

IRAN ON THE EDGE, PAGE 12

THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #137, June 26 – July 23, 2009
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Meet the New Homeless

Exclusive Report, Page 8



Franceska Dillella with her son Nick (left) and daughter Eden. PHOTO: JOEL COOK

OVERTURNING
CORPORATE
HEALTHCARE, P7

RAPPING FOR
JUSTICE, P17

OBAMA ON
TORTURE,
P14

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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays to our print and online readership of more than 100,000. The newspaper is a labor of love by a network of volunteers who do all of the reporting, writing, photography, illustration, editing, designing, distribution, fundraising and website management. Since 2000, more than 600 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have contributed their energy to this project. Winner of dozens of New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging people to produce their own media. *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of ordinary people locally and globally. *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is the newspaper project of the New York City Independent Media Center, which is affiliated with the global Indymedia movement (indymedia.org), an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production. NYC IMC sponsors three other volunteer projects: the children's newspaper *IndyKids*, the *IndyVideo* news team and the NYC IMC open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org).

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community calendar

Please send event announcements to indyevents@gmail.com.

JUNE 30

7:30pm • \$6-\$15 SLIDING SCALE
FILM/DISCUSSION: "The Media and the Hidden Wars of the Congo." Gil Noble, producer and host of WABC TV's weekly public affair, and Dr. Yaa Lengimngemi, a scholar and Africana historian, will lead the discussion.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

JULY 2

8pm • \$10 SUGGESTED DONATION
FILM: "Asylum City: A Video Project by Active Vision." This series is a compilation of films made by young asylum seekers from Africa that currently reside in Tel Aviv.
The Living Theater, 21 Clinton St
activestills.org/activevision

JULY 6

7:30-9pm • FREE
WORKSHOP: "Occupation 101: Israel a Colonial Creation" is the second of a six-part study group to discuss and examine the history of Israel and the current Middle East conflict.
Freedom Hall, 113 W 128 St
212-222-0633 • fsp@nyct.net

JULY 7

7pm • FREE
DISCUSSION: "Breadline USA: The Hidden Scandal of American Hunger." This discussion will feature Sasha Abramsky and cover U.S. communities' struggles with food and hardships when money runs out.
McNally Jackson, 52 Prince St
212-274-1160 • mcnallyjackson.com

JULY 10

6:30pm • FREE
FILM: "Arid Lands" focuses on the Hanford nuclear site, its extensive clean-up process and how the landscape affects the community today.
Cupcake Café, 545 Ninth Ave
646-723-1749 • panys.org

JULY 12

5-7pm • FREE
DISCUSSION: "Butch up on July 12." This Gather (The lesbian community under one roof) meeting will focus specifically on discussing gender perceptions focused on lesbian identities or subcul-

tures focusing on "butch" women.
LGBT Community Center, 208 W 13th St
gogatherround.blogspot.com

JULY 14

6pm-8:30pm • FREE
DISCUSSION: "Report Back from Gaza and the West Bank." This recounting of current situations in Gaza and the West Bank will feature a number of speakers, including Medea Benjamin, Phil Weiss, Felice Gelman and Manijeh Saba.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

7pm • \$20

DISCUSSION: "The Ascendancy of Obama... and the Continued Need for Resistance and Liberation." A dialogue between Cornel West and Carl Dix.
Harlem Stage at Aaron Davis Hall
150 Convent Ave (at W 135th St)
212-281-9240 • harlemstage.org

JULY 15

6-8pm • FREE
WORKSHOP: "Outdoor Composting Workshop." This workshop will focus on composting techniques. At the end, participants can purchase compost bins. Registration required.
Community Garden, 6th St and Ave B
212-477-4022 • lesecologycenter.org

JULY 17

6:30pm • FREE
FILM: "Radioactive America" focuses on nuclear weapons and the repercussions of radioactive waste and poor clean-up techniques.
Cupcake Café, 545 Ninth Ave
646-723-1749 • panys.org

7pm • \$18

PERFORMANCE: "Las Escenas de la Cruz (Scenes of the Cross)" This play, as part of the Midtown International Theatre Festival, displays the struggles of immigrant youth crossing the border from Mexico into the United States through true stories and oral histories.
Dorothy Strelsin Theatre
312 W 36th St, 1st fl • 866-811-4111
midtownfestival.org

7:30pm • FREE

MEETING: "Park Slope Ethanol Coop."

JUNE—JULY



The Park Slope Coop is forming a special co-op for renewable energy and the production of locally-made ethanol to power vehicles and heat homes.
Park Slope Food Coop, 782 Union St, Bklyn • 718-622-0560 • foodcoop.com

JULY 18

9:30am-6pm • \$75-\$95 SLIDING SCALE
CLASS: "Marxism: A Revolutionary Cure for Capitalism's Depression?" This 4-day intensive workshop will feature many authors and scholars, including Rick Wolff, discussing Marxism and theoretical and practical traditional introductions to Marxism.
Brecht Forum, 451 W St • 212-242-4201
brechtform.org

10am-4pm • FREE

SALE: "Pay The Rent Rummage Sale." This sale will feature a large collection of household and clothing items that will benefit Harlem's Freedom Hall.
Freedom Hall, 113 W 128th St
212-222-0633 • fsp@nyct.net

JULY 21

7pm • FREE
READING/DISCUSSION: "The Teeth May Smile But The Heart Does Not Forget: Murder & Memory in Uganda." This discussion will feature Andrew Rice, a journalist who investigated Idi Amin's legacy in Uganda.
McNally Jackson, 52 Prince St
212-274-1160 • mcnallyjackson.com

JULY 23

7:30pm • \$8-\$15
BENEFIT CONCERT: "Support The

Movement to Boycott Israeli Colonialism." This night will feature investigative songwriter Dave Lippman, Palestinian poet Remi Kanazi and music from the Mahina Movement.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St • 212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

JULY 24

6:30pm • FREE
FILM SERIES: "Aftermath: The Remnants of War" was released in 2001 and focuses on the after effects of ended wars such as Vietnam. Filmed in Russia, France, Bosnia and Vietnam, it is part of an evening film series held every Thursday until Aug 7.
Cupcake Café, 545 Ninth Ave
646-723-1749 • panys.org

JULY 25

7pm • \$10 Suggested Donation
EVENT: "55th Anniversary of Attack on Moncada Garrison Celebration" marks the start of the Cuban Revolution and is sponsored by the July 26 coalition.
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Labor Center Auditorium, 310 W 43rd St • 917-887-8710
july26coalition@mindspring.com

JULY 26

12-6pm • DONATION REQUESTED
CONFERENCE: "Greenworks NYC Public Forum/Green Business Expo and Job Fair." This conference will discuss green jobs, including how to build and manage sustainable enterprises. Reservation required.
NY Academy of Sciences, 7 World Trade Ctr, 250 Greenwich St, 40th fl
212-867-0846 • wetheworld.org

READER COMMENTS

Post your comments online at the end of the article or email letters@indypendent.org.

CONTAMINANTS FOR RICH OR POOR?

In response to "Hudson Contaminates Go to Texas," June 5:

I often have the feeling the big corporations just stall and stall, hoping everyone in the contemporary battle will die out and the younger not know, or wait until new judges or politicians come into office or court.

What about breathing the dust from the landfill? Why do I think it's nearer the poor folks than the rich?

—SANDA

MORE QUESTIONS, FEWER ANSWERS:

In response to "Sri Lanka's Bloody Conflicts Not Over Yet," June 5:

Now that the LTTE rebels have been completely wiped out (according to the Sri Lankan government) why are they still not allowing independent Aid organizations and the media?

—EEZHA THAMIZHAN

DEBATING WBAI

In response to "WBAI bounces back," June 5:

As you can tell from the ugliness of some of the comments to this fine article it's been a long grim rides these nearly pat 10 years. I think the problem at heart was that some within the station sincerely felt that WBAI belonged to them. That or, at least, they were charged with safe-guarding it for those the believed in a particular racial ideology. This is how one

group of blacks, can call another racists or as above "house negros." The WBAI faction wars have been a long sad experience for the listeners, volunteers and staff. I hope it is, at last, over.

—SIDNEY SMITH, WBAI HOST

NO MORE BULLIES

In response to "School Bullying Is Not Child's Play," May 15:

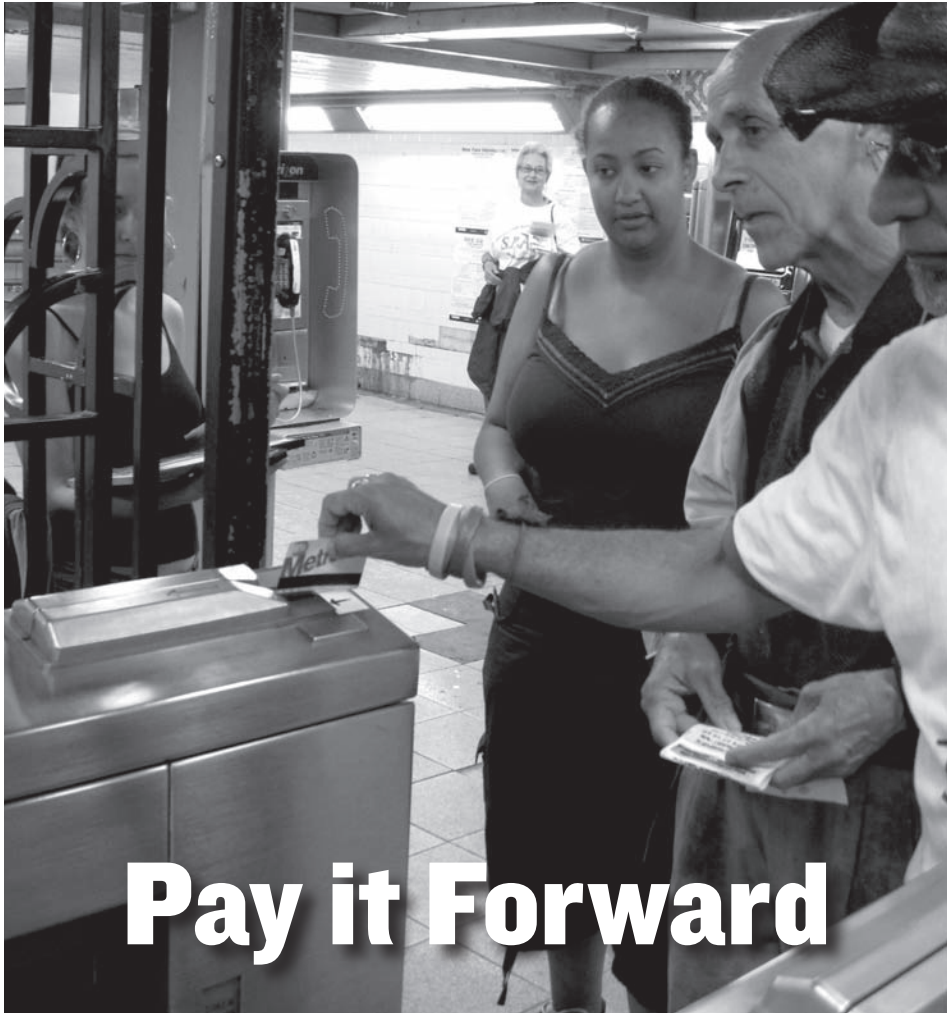
I completely agree that the bill regarding the Safe School Improvement Act should be passed. After reading this article I cannot imagine what the parents and family members of this family went through/are going through. It does not matter whether or not these boys were gay, bisexual, or transgendered, the fact that they were not safe



or feeling safe at school is a major problem that those schools need to deal with.

—Courtney

Continued on page 19



Pay it Forward

By JULIA DUNN

It’s not often that anyone gets a free ride during a recession, but throughout the city, a growing program is giving out more than 600 subway MetroCard swipes each month.

“The idea is that we can’t just be silent, we can’t sit back,” said East Harlem community activist Jacob Rosette. “We need to organize in our communities.”

In response to the economic recession and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s (MTA) fare hikes, community activists across the city are organizing the People’s Transportation Program (PTP), days where the goal is to swipe as many people through the turnstiles as possible with several daily unlimited MetroCards. Every third Satur-

day of the month, train riders in the Bronx, East Harlem, Queens and Brooklyn may walk into subway stations to find someone willing to pay their way.

“Regardless of what the MTA does, we’re trying to look out for ourselves and advance our own needs and our own interests,” Rosette said. Rosette estimated that he and other East Harlem activists swiped in up to 300 people May 30 in only three hours at the 116th Street and Lexington Avenue subway station.

Perhaps, surprisingly, the People’s Transportation System is not breaking the law. Individuals are free to share unlimited MetroCards, although they must wait 18 minutes between swipes for the card to reactivate.

“As long as they’re not charging people [for swipes], we can’t stop them from buy-

FREE RIDE: Sunset Park community activists swipe in a Brooklyn commuter for free ride with a shared daily unlimited MetroCard June 20.
PHOTO: JESSICA LEE

ing the cards and providing the service free to the people,” MTA spokesperson Paul Fleuranges told *The Independent*.

Gene Russianoff, director of the New York Public Interest Research Group’s Straphangers Campaign, said that roughly half of the revenue for the \$6 billion annual budget for the city’s transit system comes from user fares alone. Russianoff, however, said it would take a lot of MetroCard sharing to make a dent in the revenue.

“Even if you got 50,000 people to do the boycott or join the protest movement, it would go largely unnoticed because you have millions of people who are using the system,” Russianoff said. The MTA estimates that the system handles 7.5 million rides daily from 3.5 million commuters.

“We are trying really hard to get the community involved and create a new culture of people helping people,” said East Harlem resident Hectar Gerarbo, who co-founded the Block Movement with Rosette in January this year. The Block Movement was set up to run programs to benefit the community like the PTP and anti-police brutality networks.

The activists say their inspiration is based on models of autonomous community organizing created by the Black Panther Party more than 40 years ago. The Black Panthers developed community “survival programs” that provided aid to neighborhoods in need.

In order to raise money to buy the \$7.50 daily unlimited MetroCards, the PTP groups organize events such as open mic nights and house parties. They also find supporters to share their unlimited MetroCards.

“We get a few artists or poets together to sort of donate their time and talent to raise funds for the PTP,” said Javier Genao of Sunset Park, Brooklyn. “We tell the audience what we’re doing and why we’re doing it and collect donations.”

Members of the Sunset Park Alliance of Neighbors organized a local PTP group. Sunset Park resident Lida Shao explained that it typically costs their group \$75 each Saturday they head into the subway, money that is raised through grassroots efforts. On June 20, the group swiped in approximately 200 people at the 36th Street subway sta-

tion in Sunset Park.

“I think people are really suffering,” said Bay Ridge resident Barbara Reish June 20 before she was swiped in for free at the subway station in Sunset Park. “For a lot of people, the subway fare just getting to work or around town is a hardship. And to have the means for people to get a free ride, it’s fabulous.”

The activists say they get to talk to subway riders as they wait for the card to reactivate for a free swipe. “It’s just a cool moment when everyone’s lives combine,” Shao said.

Rosette and Gerarbo said they posted a video on YouTube to promote the PTP concept throughout New York City. The PTP hopes to expand the effort in the future in order to serve every community. Eventually, they hope their campaign will inspire change within the MTA.

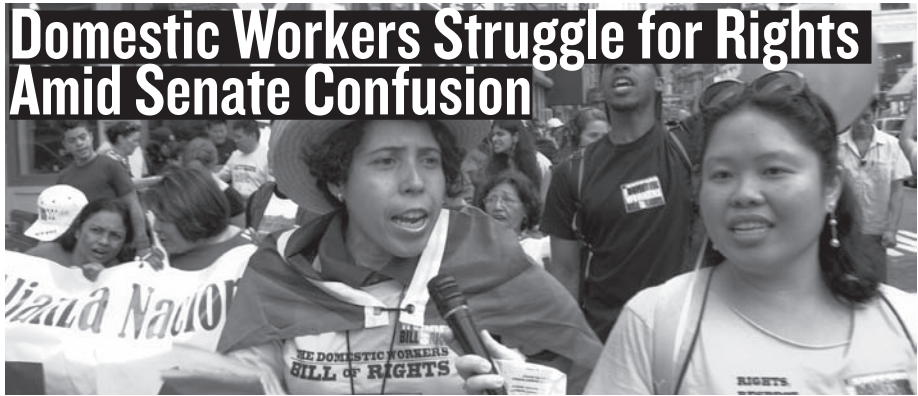
“I think the viable option we need most is the transit fare sustained at an affordable level,” said Wiley Norvell, communications director for Transportation Alternatives.

Gerarbo and Rosette say they are focused on creating societal change and instilling a culture of people helping people — without waiting for the government or the MTA to assist them. “We’re not doing this for ourselves,” Rosette said. “We see this as a small step toward the society that we want to live in.”

In the wake of the MTA fare increase June 28, all PTP groups are organizing a day of protest and action where they hope to sign up more people to help swipe in commuters for free.

“The politicians have forgotten that the people are the main ingredient. Without us there would be no corporations or politicians or MTA,” Gerarbo said. “They need to understand that we run things, the community, the people on this earth, we run things.”

For more information, visit spanbrooklyn.org or blockmvmt.com. Jaisal Noor contributed reporting to this story.



By JACQUIE SIMONE

The uncertain power-sharing agreement between Democrats and Republicans in the New York State Senate could jeopardize the passage of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which is designed to improve working conditions for some 200,000 domestic workers in New York.

The bill would ensure overtime pay, advance notice of termination, annual cost of living increases, healthcare and protection against discrimination, as well as paid sick days, personal days and vacation days. Domestic workers are not protected by the National Labor Relations Act or similar labor legislation. Domestic Workers United (DWU) has been a leader in this five-year campaign.

Recent DWU events in New York City include a 24-hour vigil for the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights June 12 and a children and families

march for domestic workers’ rights June 14. The bill (A1470/S2311) has been approved by the Assembly and Senate Labor Committees and is waiting to be debated on the floors of both chambers.

The June 8 coup in the State Senate, in which two Democrats — Sens. Pedro Espada (Bronx) and Hiram Monserrate (Queens) — switched parties, enabled the Republicans to claim control, hindering progress on this and other legislative issues.

Since then, Monserrate has switched back to the Democratic Party, leaving the Senate split 31-31. Both Monserrate and Espada are co-sponsors of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. While some Republican senators support the bill, as *The Independent* went to press the ambiguous Senate leadership was continuing to postpone discussion of the bill.

For more information, domesticworkersunited.org.

GOOD JUDGMENT

By JAISAL NOOR

The case against the South Bronx-based hip-hop artists Rodrigo and Gonzalo Venegas was dropped June 18, exactly one year after the brothers were arrested by the New York police when they offered to translate for a Hunts Point street vendor who, they felt, was being harassed by police officers.

On June 18, Judge Darcel Clark unexpectedly granted a motion to dismiss the brothers’ two misdemeanor charges of obstruction of justice and resisting arrest, citing their positive impact in the community. Rodrigo “RodStarz” and Gonzalo “G1” are part of the group Rebel Diaz, along with Teresita “Lah Tere” Ayala.

“The last words the judge left us with was ‘Keep up the good work,’” Gonzalo told *The Independent*, adding, “We left that courtroom with more conviction in what we do.”

The vocal support of the community “impressed a court system that isn’t easily impressed and isn’t easily affected by those sorts of things,” said Leah Horowitz, an attorney from the Bronx Defenders who filed the motion for dismissal. It included letters of support from more than 30 community members and organizations.

Through their music and activism, Rebel

Diaz have joined other community groups in resisting continued gentrification in the South Bronx. “That is the reason they [the police] are doing immigrant street vendor sweeps,” Rodrigo said. “That is the reason why they are arresting young people ... We are going to keep calling out the powers that be.”

To read the full article and previous Rebel Diaz coverage, visit indypedent.org



A GROWING MOVEMENT TO EAT LOCALLY

By JESSICA AGUIRRE

As her three kids crawled around her legs, a young Brooklyn mother testified that she could not afford food in her neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Assembled community members nodded knowingly, recounting their long treks to food cooperatives in other neighborhoods and lamenting the ubiquity of unhealthy eating habits.

The group had gathered in Magnolia Tree Earth Center in Bed-Stuy June 4 to discuss their local food system. The meeting was part of a new grassroots movement that is slowly spreading across Brooklyn in the wake of the borough's first annual Brooklyn Food Conference, held May 2. Organizers hoped that the conference would help build a network devoted to increasing food democracy: equal access to healthy food produced under sustainable and non-exploitive conditions.

The conference catalyzed the beginning of a yearlong food justice campaign. Within a month of the conference, people have come together at the neighborhood level to envision what local food might look like in their communities. Meetings are held in the evenings, in an assortment of makeshift spaces — coffee shops, temples, community centers and classrooms.

"We decided at one point that having folks come to the conference, learn a bunch of information and then go home and go back to eating Doritos was probably not the best way to use this information and use these resources," said Erica Lonesome, one of the conference organizers. Lonesome says that the movement is organized on a neighborhood level because each community knows best what its goals and needs are.

Another conference organizer, Ajamu Brown, emphasized the importance of making a Brooklyn-based food movement that reflects its varied communities. "How can we talk about food democracy when we're not repping all these other neighborhoods in Brooklyn?" Brown said.

Six neighborhoods have held meetings thus far, with one more scheduled in June and at least four more in the works. While the organizational structure is still being determined, the goal is to have an overarching Brooklyn Food Coalition that brings together the work of each neighborhood and provides support for local projects.

PARK SLOPE: Meeting organizers assembled among chairs neatly arranged in concentric circles under the lofty roof of the Congregation Beth Elohim on the evening of June 11. Most belonged to the Park Slope Food Coop and many had a hand in organizing the conference. The focus of the meeting was toward building policy initiatives around sustainable food, improving school meals, setting local business standards and supporting projects in other neighborhoods. Issues of class were often raised in the discussion.

"We are in a neighborhood that has all this bounty. There are more restaurants and more food stores per capita than probably any place in Brooklyn," said community member Jeff Heeks. "That's an advantage and a privilege that we enjoy in this neighborhood," he said.

"If affluent areas don't tackle [school food], then it's not going to get tackled in less affluent areas," added Coop member Kathie Borowitz. "If we feel that a certain percentage of our work should be focused on Park Slope proper, then this kind of school initiative seems like a good idea because that would ultimately be something we'd like to see growing elsewhere." Heeks also supported focusing efforts on Park Slope and suggested implementing a business rating system to encourage socially and environmentally responsible practices.

KENSINGTON/DITMAS/WINDSOR TERRACE: The small neighborhood meeting took place in a golden evening light that filtered onto the wood tables of Vox Pop café June 6. The group discussed a variety of issues, including transforming vacant lots into community gardens, food education and outreach, and policy organizing.

"A lot of people have their little gardens in this neighborhood," said community member Kathy Schwarz. "But those of us who don't ... you know I look at them, I look at all of them, but I just don't have access!" David Buckel, who organized the meeting, agreed, and noted that Kensington has many vacant lots that could be converted into community gardens.

The community has a local food co-op and a Community Supported Agriculture program, but meeting attendees agreed that food education would be beneficial to the community. They hope to organize cooking demonstrations and similar outreach events to get more community members involved with their food. "There's something very visceral about seeing your food come out of the ground before it goes into your mouth," said Brooklyn Food Conference organizer Erica Lonesome.

BEDFORD-STUYVESANT: A recurring theme of the June 4 meeting held at the art-filled Magnolia Tree Earth Center was the challenge of mobilizing such an expansive neighborhood. Bed-Stuy, which has 56 community gardens and a multitude of food programs, struggles to make healthy food accessible to all of its inhabitants.

"There's a perception that fresh food is harder, and fast food is easier," said Rev. Devanie Jackson, one of the co-founders of the Brooklyn Rescue Mission. "We need to change that through education. You got to come against generations of habits."

Yonette Fleming, vice president of the Hattie Carthan Community Garden, spoke of the projects their new farmers market is implementing to address challenges. "We're inviting community gardeners, backyard gardeners and rooftop gardeners to come under the same arrangement as our community garden and we're doing our best to entice farmers that they will do business in Bed-Stuy. ... Minority neighborhoods need fresh food," she said.

At a follow-up meeting June 15, a smaller Bed-Stuy group moved in a decidedly more political direction, articulating the need for a philosophical framework and community education. At the next meeting, scheduled for July 14 at 6:30 p.m., they hope to hold an open training for community organizing.

BROWNSVILLE: "The people in Brownsville don't have grocery stores to go to," said Erica Lonesome. "They have to go out of their community to buy food." She was one of the few people to attend the small Brownsville meeting, which was held at the Brownsville Branch Brooklyn Public Library. The overwhelming focus of the meeting was on improving school food and lunch programs for children.

PROSPECT HEIGHTS/CROWN HEIGHTS:

The organizers at the meeting, overwhelmingly young women, clustered around tables jammed together in a classroom at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden on June 10. As canteens and notebooks crowded the tables, the attendees brainstormed about various local food campaigns.

The main concerns voiced in the meeting were the inaccessibility of affordable produce and healthy food, the lack of community gardens and the quality of public school food. "I walk around Brooklyn and I see little patches of ground and I think, 'There should be food there,'" said Hope Kitts.

"Being in Crown Heights ... the two healthy food options [that exist are] extremely expensive," said community member Nicki Marshall, as the group discussed how to increase the availability of healthy local food. She also noted that, when picking up her Community Supported Agriculture share the day before, she had been one of only two people of color on site. "Why do the majority of people who live in this community not know about [the CSA program]?"

Noting the homogeneity of meeting attendees, community member Irene Shen observed that, "When we're trying to deal with the barriers of race and class around these issues, I think that very specific and strategic thinking needs to occur." Others echoed Shen's concern and concluded that making the organizing committee more diverse was a priority for the group.

OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS:

CARROLL GARDENS/GOWANUS: A meeting was held June 11.

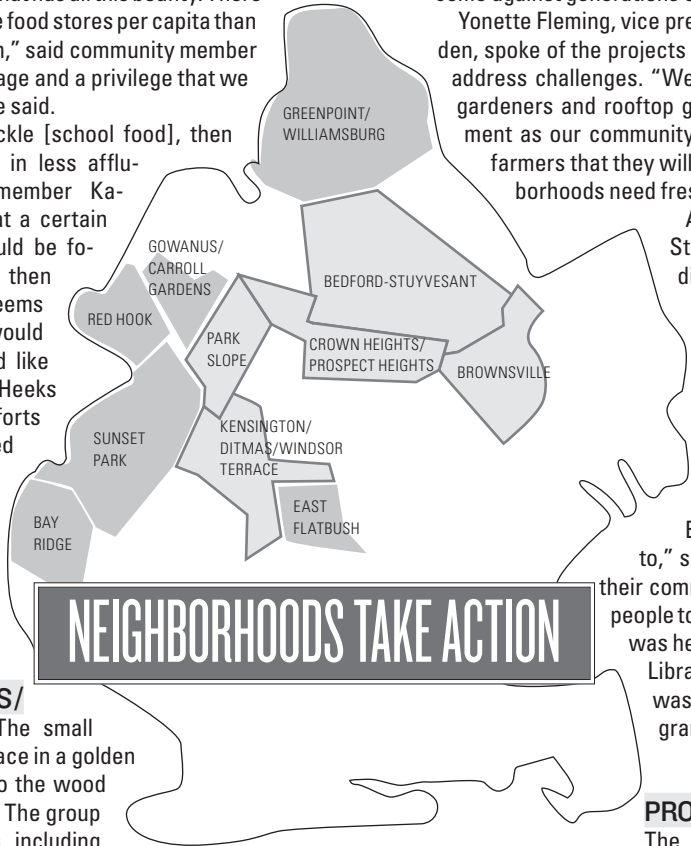
EAST NEW YORK: A meeting is scheduled for July 7 at 7:30 p.m. at East New York Farms.

RED HOOK: Community members are working to organize the first meeting.

SUNSET PARK: Community members are working to organize the first meeting.

WILLIAMSBURG/GREENPOINT: Community members are working to organize the first meeting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO START YOUR OWN GROUP:
brooklynfoodconference.org



HEALTHY FOOD: Dozens crammed into a classroom at John Jay High School May 2 in Park Slope for a discussion on sustainability and food justice at the Brooklyn Food Conference. PHOTO: JOHANNA BJÖRK/GOODLIFER.COM



123 COMMUNITY SPACE FOR YOUTH FACES EVICTION



By Soozy Duncan

It is easy to see how the 123 Community Space, located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn, attracts kids. Handmade signs in the window lead into a room of beat-up, comfortable couches. Colorful artwork and political posters cover the walls above shelves lined with radical ’zines and books, which bear titles like *No More Prisons*. And perhaps most appealing is the long, narrow basement crammed with recycled frames, tires and tools of the Freegan Bike Workshop.

But it looks like the space will not be there much longer. Nearly two years after its doors first opened at 123 Tompkins Avenue, the community center is undergoing eviction proceedings in the Brooklyn branch of Civil Court.

Originally formed by four grassroots groups, 123 was envisioned as a common space for learning and organizing. With

daily free public programs used by both adults and approximately 50 youths in the neighborhood, it would seem to be a success. Programs include a radical lending library, screen printing and sewing workshops, an afterschool program and the Bike Workshop, where anyone can get help building or repairing a bicycle. The space is also home to a chapter of Food Not Bombs and North Bed-Stuy CopWatch. In Our Hearts anarchist network and the NYC Anarchist Black Cross Federation are founding members of the collective. The space is run entirely by volunteers and funded by donations. Decisions are made by consensus at weekly meetings that are open to the public.

The last lease expired in December 2008, and 123, established as a Limited Liability Corporation last fall, has been unable to re-negotiate a new one, paying month to month in the interim. The acting building manager, Yoel Friedman, who is the son of the owner of the management company,

Tompkins Villas, stated that the tenants never satisfied an undisclosed stipulation in the lease.

Quinn Hechtkopf, of the Bike Workshop, claims the group was approached by the landlord in March with the demand that they purchase a \$2,000 one-year rental insurance policy from one of Friedman’s associates, though the group could only negotiate a three-month lease. A few weeks later, in early April, eviction papers were shoved under the door. Friedman declined to comment on the insurance policy.

Members of the collective indicated a variety of reasons they feel may have contributed to the landlord’s decision, ranging from racism to unwillingness to make repairs and the refusal of the landlord to recognize the LLC.

Volunteer Stephane Barile stated that at the first eviction hearing May 19, the judge described 123’s representatives as “good, clean-cut kids,” asking the complainants, “Why would you want to kick them out?” Barile said that Tompkins Villas’ attorney indicated simply that the “relationship had soured,” although, she added, 123 is “paying above-market rent right now and we pay that on time.”

Friedman confirmed that 123 has never been delinquent in paying the \$2,000 monthly rent. Commercial real estate law, however, gives the now-leaseless 123 little protection. Tompkins Villas is attempting to evict 123 through a “holdover case,” in which a land-

lord seeks to evict a tenant for reasons other than simple non-payment of rent.

Volunteer and Bed-Stuy resident Sandra Cacho said that both of her sons attend 123 programs regularly. The closing of the space would “push a lot of kids into the street, which is something we’re already dealing with anyway,” she said. Cacho also mentioned that there is no local alternative. “I just can’t see myself not putting up a fight for something that my kids love,” she said.

Friedman also acknowledged that 123 is “a good thing for the community,” but that it needs “better management” in the future.

The 123 collective is seeking a new location and volunteers expressed commitment to continuing their work. But relocating the community space represents the loss of much invested labor, and volunteers say the move will intrinsically change the nature of the project.

“There’s no way that 123, as it stands, could exist anywhere outside of that immediate neighborhood,” said Margie Grace, a 123 founding member. She noted that while volunteers can commute to a new spot, it will affect the kids who need a stable and proximate location.

It is expected that the next eviction hearing on June 25 will legally end 123’s tenancy.

Shawn, age 9, lives around the corner and visits the space every day after school. Without 123 in his neighborhood, Shawn says, “I would have to be in my house every day bored. Bored, bored, bored.”



Best-selling author
Jeremy Scahill calls
The Independent
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THE INDEPENDENT JUNE 26 – JULY 23, 2009 5

THE PEOPLE'S LAWYER

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RIGHT TO POLICE PERSUASION

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

On May 26, the U.S. Supreme Court made a radical departure from settled law when it ruled in *Montejo v. Louisiana* that police could continue to question a suspect even when his court-appointed attorney is not present.

The 5 to 4 decision revoked the Court's 1986 ruling in *Michigan v. Jackson* and erased the distinct line that guarantees that the questioning of a suspect by police will cease upon the appointment of counsel. As Justice John Paul Stephens noted in his dissenting opinion, "The purpose of the Sixth Amendment is to protect the unaided layman at critical confrontations with his adversary by giving him the right to rely on counsel as a medium between himself and the State."

There is little doubt that Jesse Montejomurdered his friend Lewis Ferrari. Montejofessed to the killing after waiving his Miranda rights, which include the right to remain silent and the right to an attorney, before he was arraigned in district court in Sept. 2002. In a twist that would propel the case all the way to the Supreme Court, Montejos court-appointed lawyer was unable to meet with his client the day before police had persuaded the defendant to waive his Miranda rights, lead authorities to the murder weapon and write a letter of apology to the victim's family.

The trial judges decision to allow the tainted evidence to be used (Montejo was convicted and sentenced to death) was upheld by the Louisiana Supreme Court. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which was originally asked to rule only on the Louisiana courts exceedingly narrow reading of the law under *Jackson*.

After oral argument in January, the case took a cynical turn when Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Antonin Scalia ordered the parties to brief the question of whether *Michigan v. Jackson* should be overturned.

President Obamas Justice Department took the bait and argued that the protections provided by *Jackson* are no longer needed and Montejos confession outside the presence of his lawyer was admissible in court.

However, numerous former state and federal law enforcement officials and judges filed an amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in support of the previous law, stating that the Sixth Amendment protections provided by Jackson had not harmed the criminal justice system.

Scalia flippantly replied to critics, writing in the majority opinion that, "If the rule truly does not hinder law enforcement or make much practical difference, then there is no reason to be particularly exercised about its demise."

How much respect is due to a court like this? The quartet of Justice Roberts, Scalia, Alito and Thomas has scaled the heights of judicial activism.

A MOTHER'S NIGHTMARE

A Senegalese Woman Struggles to Save Her Daughters

BY KAREN YI

Having survived female genital mutilation when she was three years old in Senegal, Fatoumata does not want her four U.S.-born daughters to face the same violence. But as an undocumented immigrant at risk of deportation, the past Fatoumata fought to leave behind might be catching up to her children.

Fatoumata, who requested that her last name be withheld, is fighting her case in U.S. immigration courts. If her application for political asylum is denied, then she faces the unenviable dilemma of either separating from her children, who have U.S. citizenship, or moving them back to Senegal where her family is demanding her daughters undergo the traditional genital cutting.

"What we see is that the U.S. asylum system at present is widely inconsistent in resolving gender-based claims," said Jeanne Smoot, director of public policy at the Ta-

toumata struggling as a single mom with six kids. Without legal status to work, Fatoumata has no means of earning a steady income and has recently moved into the New York City shelter system, relying on \$731 in food stamps a month to feed her family.

"We came so we can make a family and a better place, thats our dream," Fatoumata said, "but I dont know. Its getting worse for us."

Although female genital mutilation is illegal in Senegal, enforcement is very weak, explains Taina Bien-Aimé, executive director of Equality Now, an international human rights organization dedicated to womens rights. "It is such a strong cultural tradition and its also very difficult for the child to go and complain," Bien-Aimé said.

Although the procedure varies in each country and village, Bien-Aimé described a typical scenario of female genital mutilation: "A number of women hold the girl down — one at her head, one at each arm.

based groups have formed a defense committee for Fatoumata, providing advocacy and resources and promoting public awareness. Two years ago Fatoumata filed a motion to reopen her asylum case. The motion was denied by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) and is currently waiting to be heard in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Joshua Bardavid, Fatoumatas pro-bono immigration attorney, said he expects her case to be denied based on a procedural hurdle established by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. Under the 1996 laws, a person cannot reopen his or her case more than 90 days after the case is decided.

Bardavid, however, is working on a new motion to reopen her case based on evidence that asylum status is needed in order to protect her daughters.

While the 1996 case of Fauziya Kasinga established female genital mutilation as



PROTECTING HER FAMILY: Five of Fatoumatas six children hold her tight. Having already lost their father, they say they are afraid their mother will be deported, too. To protect her identity, Fatoumata covers her face. PHOTO: KAREN YI

hirih Justice Center, a nongovernmental organization that works to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. "There really is a lack of recognition, a lack of clear compassion for the fact that obviously a fear of persecution to ones children really is a fear of persecution to oneself."

More than 14 years ago, Fatoumata arrived in the United States with her husband and settled in New York City. Her husband immediately applied for political asylum, listing her for "derivative status," a provision that helps protect spouses and children. His application was denied. Fatoumatas lawyer could not comment on the case.

Fatoumata and her husband, however, remained in the United States illegally and began a family. Thirteen years and six children later, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested Fatoumatas husband on July 20, 2007. She said that ICE arrived at their home in the middle of the night, taking Fatoumata and her children by surprise.

"My children were in the bed that time," Fatoumata said. "They were shaking," because of "the way ICE was acting, yelling, screaming. They have flashlights, they carry the guns, they were going all over the house."

The house raid, and subsequent deportation of her husband four months later, left Fa-

They open her legs and then they just take whatever they have available — a razor, a sharp knife, sometimes a stone — and they start slicing. It is generally done without anesthesia and in very unsanitary conditions." The procedure involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia.

This scene could await Fatoumatas four daughters, 6, 9, 11 and 13 years old. Facing heavy pressure from her family back in Senegal to have her daughters subjected to the cutting, Fatoumata fears the worst. "If I go back [to Senegal] I dont have any power to stop them," she said.

Female genital mutilation is most commonly performed between the ages of four and eight, but it can take place from infancy to adolescence. It is considered one of the worst violations listed in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Amnesty International estimates that, as of 2005, more than 136 million women worldwide have been affected by some form of genital cutting.

If Fatoumata is not granted political asylum, she could be deported back to Senegal. Rather than leave her six children in foster care, Fatoumata says shell take them with her. But with the safety of her kids on the line, Fatoumata is fighting for a way to stay here, and she is not alone.

A coalition of immigrant rights and faith-

a reason for political asylum, Smoot said, "The law at present doesnt provide a clear means for parents seeking to protect their children to be granted asylum."

"Fatoumatas case is really emblematic of whats wrong with the system," said Janis Rosheuvel, director of Families for Freedom, an immigrant rights organization.

"To make the impossible choice between those two terrible extremes — either to place their daughters at risk but keep their families together or remove that risk only by surrendering those girls to grow a world apart from them, in our opinion, effectively threatens to create a foster class of girls who are left behind here and families that are separated in order to secure the girls' protection," Smoot said.

Since the United States approves the applications of just over 20 percent of the political asylum cases each year, Fatoumata faces an uphill battle. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office of Immigration Review, the Immigration Courts granted about 10,700 of about 47,400 asylum cases in fiscal year 2008.

"When I think about why Fatoumata not deserves, but needs, to stay here, I can just count to six ... her six kids who are all U.S. citizens," Rosheuvel said.

FIGHTING TO CURE A SICK SYSTEM

By Laura S. Boylan

Katie Robbins thinks the fight for universal healthcare is so important she is willing to put her butt on the line.

An organizer with Healthcare-NOW!, Robbins is helping to ratchet up protests to push Congress to establish a single-payer healthcare system.

As part of the campaign, Robbins and others are donning hospital gowns and shiny plastic buttocks that stick out the back of their gowns. Once dressed, the activists take their message to the public: “Private health insurance is like a hospital gown, chances are your ass is not covered.”

On a recent Saturday afternoon, Robbins and other activists jumped on a subway train on the 1 line. They handed out flyers explaining that healthcare should be a human right and publicly funded insurance for everyone was the best solution to the healthcare crisis. The activists happened upon a Mariachi band, and the combination of outlandish outfits and festive music seemed to inspire subway riders to scoop up the leaflets.

In the past, proponents of single-payer healthcare took a more conventional approach. For 20 years, Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) have used academic journals, traditional media and PowerPoint presentations to spread its message. But things are heating up.

In January, doctors, nurses, students, labor unions, religious organizations and activists launched the Leadership Conference for Guaranteed Health Care. Inspired by the Leadership Conference for Civil Rights,

which helped pass groundbreaking legislation in the 1960s, the healthcare alliance claims to represent more than 20 million people.

Single-payer healthcare advocates argue that only by having the federal government provide business- and taxpayer-funded health insurance can everyone receive guaranteed healthcare access. This system would also save money by eliminating the health insurance industry’s profits and extensive bureaucracy.

In contrast, the Obama administration and Congress propose new industry regulations, mandates and public subsidies for individuals to purchase private insurance, and perhaps some type of public insurance. These proposals would still leave millions of Americans uninsured while subsidizing for-profit insurers.

To pay for the plans, Democrats, with no shortage of Republican support, are considering \$600 billion in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, a first-ever national sales tax and taxes on employer-based health insurance.

Single-payer healthcare has more support in the public than in the halls of power. Only after single-payer healthcare advocates mobilized a mass call-in campaign and threatened a demonstration of health professionals were they invited to Obama’s healthcare summit in March.

Yet they were excluded from key hearings in the Senate Finance Committee chaired by Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who raked in

more than \$1.8 million in healthcare industry donations in the 2008 election cycle.

In May, 13 protesters, including doctors and nurses, were arrested after they disrupted committee hearings by standing up and demanding a seat at the table. Robbins was the third to speak out. She declared, “We want a seat at the table.” In response, Baucus snapped, “We need more police.”

Baucus told one activist at a public event in Washington, D.C., in May that he supports single-payer healthcare but does not push for it because “we don’t have the votes.”

Activists targeted Baucus when he came home on recess after the finance committee hearings. Single-payer healthcare supporters were a visible and vocal presence at town hall meetings across Montana. Baucus canceled personal appearances, sending instead a video and a representative for this “listening tour.” A “buy back our senator” campaign is in the works.

Single-payer healthcare advocates have made modest inroads into legislative hearings. Dr. Margaret Flowers, one of the “Baucus 13,” was invited to testify before a Senate committee. Flowers said, “We are

no closer to having more support for single-payer in the Senate, [but] things are a little better in the House,” Flowers said. She added that one goal is to get the Congressional Budget Office to do a financial analysis of single-payer healthcare this year.

Healthcare industry lobbying groups reported \$127 million in lobbying expenditures in the first three months of this year. Five trade associations combined have hired more than 20 former government employees as lobbyists, including ex-congressional staffers. PNHP has five staffers for all operations and an annual budget of less than \$1 million.

Some opponents of single-payer healthcare have resorted to artificial grassroots movements known as “Astro Turf.” One Boston consulting firm hired by the insurance industry reportedly faked letters from senior citizens in support of Medicare privatization.

Instead of relying on money and underhanded tactics, Flowers says, “We must build a civil rights movement like those that have come before.”

Laura S. Boylan, M.D., is a practicing neurologist, faculty member at the New York University School of Medicine and board member of Physicians for a National Health Program Metro NY.

For More Information:
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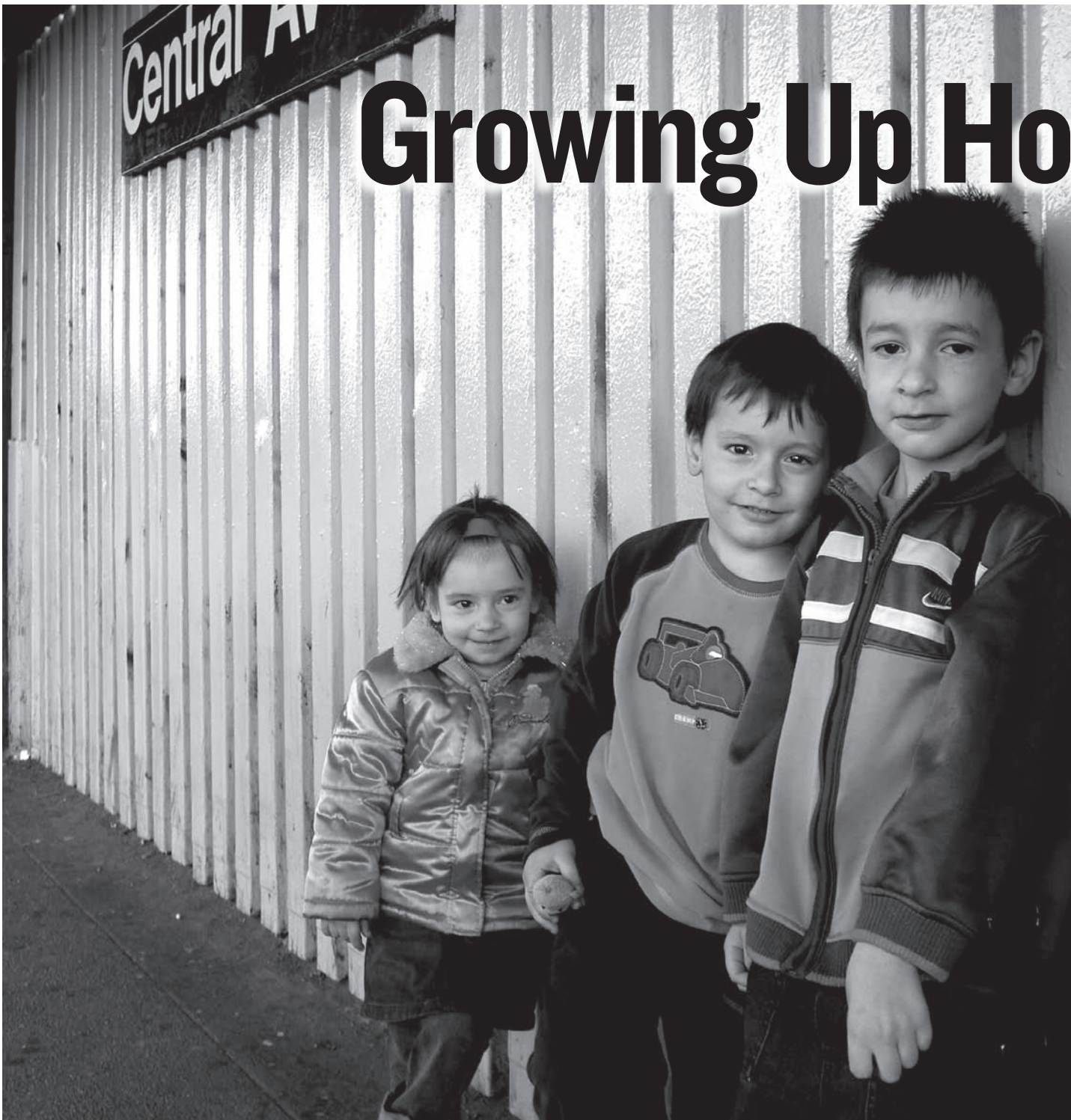
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HOPING FOR THE BEST: Eden, Nick and Zach (left to right) start each day with a two-hour subway ride. PHOTO: JOEL COOK

Growing Up Homeless

BY SARAH SECUNDA

Franceska Dillella and her three children are attracting a lot of attention. The other passengers on a crowded train on the M line wear tight smiles as two-year-old Eden hollers and swings around the car's center pole. Her brother Nick, 4, is pushing a toy truck around. Six-year-old Zach, meanwhile, keeps asking his mother if he can have a dollar to get an ice cream cone after school. Yes, Franceska says, taking the opportunity to cleanse his hands with sanitizer wipes.

It is another typical weekday morning as the family endures its two-hour commute from Bushwick, Brooklyn, to Astoria, Queens, where the children attend school. This routine, forced upon them by the City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), leaves Franceska exhausted when the day has hardly begun. But she is often tired these days. Since October, she and her children have been homeless. Her marriage has collapsed. And navigating "the system" has proved to be an impossible task, even for a self-described "extroverted, happy 30-year-old."

"I feel like I've aged ten years," says Franceska. "I feel so numbed out by the whole experience, I don't even feel like it's me."

LIVING ON THE BRINK

It was only two years ago that Franceska and her husband Joe decided to move back to New York City. The Astoria natives had been living in Springfield, Mass., for a little more than a year when a great deal fell into their laps: a three-bedroom house for \$1,000 a month rent in the Queens College Point neighborhood. The couple agreed that the arrangement would help them realize their long-term goals. Franceska would go back to

BLOOMBERG PLAN IS A BUST

Back in June 2004, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced an ambitious five-year plan to reduce the number of homeless New Yorkers by two-thirds.

"At its heart," the mayor said, "this new plan aims to replace the city's over-reliance on shelters with innovative, cost-effective interventions that solve homelessness."

Bloomberg's five years are up, and critics say there's little cause for celebration. While the City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) reported a decrease in the single adult shelter population, the total homeless population continues to hover around 36,000. More significantly, since 2005, the number of families entering the shelter system has steadily increased. The nonprofit Coalition for the Homeless reported that in March 2009 there were more than 9,600 families with 15,500 children living in city shelters. (DHS has not released an annual progress report on the mayor's plan since July 2005.)

DHS counters criticism by pointing to the number of families moved out of the shelter system each month. But these numbers are misleading, says Ralph da Costa Nunez, president of the Institute for Children and Poverty, a nonprofit that researches family homelessness. While DHS trumpets the number of families moved out of the system, says Nunez, it neglects to mention the

number who re-enter it. "[Shelters] see families come back all the time," Nunez says. He believes the high recidivism rate is a direct consequence of the Bloomberg administration's scramble to meet what he calls an "arbitrary goal."

"They're getting into the business of pushing people through the system," Nunez says.

As a deputy to the Mayor's Office of Homelessness Services under Ed Koch, Nunez was responsible for coordinating the policies and services administered by all city agencies dealing with homelessness. He has since authored six books on family homelessness, including, *A Shelter is Not a Home — Or Is It? Lessons from Family Homelessness in New York City*.

Nunez says the push to reduce the shelter population is being facilitated by new DHS initiatives, including "targets." Every month the city sets a target number of families to be moved out of each nonprofit shelter.

"For every family you go above the target, you'll get \$2,000," explains Nunez. But for every family that a shelter falls below the target, "they'll deduct \$2,000, or something like that." The targets are "often unachievable," he says, and subject to change from month to month.

Another DHS initiative attracted national attention in early May when *The New York Times* reported that the department had begun charg-

ing rent to the working homeless living in city-contracted shelters. The media unearthed numerous cases of people living at the poverty line being told to pay up to 50 percent of their income or face eviction from their shelters.

The Bloomberg administration said the program had been mandated by a state regulation. Advocacy groups, as well as many city officials including City Comptroller and mayoral candidate William Thompson, decried the rent program as an attack on the working poor.

"We think what we see here is the Bloomberg administration trying to put into place policies that make it harder for families to stay in shelters in an attempt to push them out," says Patrick Markee, senior policy analyst of the Coalition for the Homeless.

The rent program also penalizes shelter providers, Nunez says, noting that the provider, not the municipality, collects the rent from the tenant. If a tenant fails to pay, the shelter suffers a financial loss. Nunez calls the policy another instance of the Bloomberg administration "trying to force the providers to move [tenants] out faster." More remarkable, Nunez says, is the policy's short-sightedness: Families evicted from shelter for failure to pay will only end up re-entering the system.

DHS announced the suspension of the rent

program May 21. In a written statement, Commissioner Robert V. Hess said the department was "actively working with the state to make sure [the program] is not reinstated until it is fair and understandable."

New York City Council member Bill de Blasio, chair of the General Welfare Committee, is calling on Bloomberg to lobby in support of state legislation, introduced several weeks ago by Senator Daniel Squadron and Assemblyman Keith Wright, that would nullify the state regulation.

Meanwhile, the city's foundering shelter system is being forced to absorb a new population composed of working-class families hard hit by the recession. Since June 2008, reports the Coalition for the Homeless, the number of homeless families living in New York City shelters has increased by 12 percent, and the number of new families entering the system is at a record high.

The Bloomberg administration, in the meantime, has not shifted from the policies enacted under its five-year plan. Nor has the Mayor, who is facing reelection, publicly addressed how his administration intends to respond to the surge of new homeless families.

Nunez, for one, is pessimistic. "You look at this issue a year from now, and you watch how their hands are going to be full," Nunez says. "This whole system is going to explode." —S.S.

Franceska Dillella and her three kids have been in New York City’s homeless shelter system since October.

“I feel so numbed out by the whole experience,” she says. “I don’t even feel like it’s me.”

work, she and Joe would save, and eventually they would have enough money to buy their own place. In May 2007, the family returned to Queens.

But their great deal wasn’t so sweet. The house, old and run-down, came with a moldy bathroom and walls that required repainting. Their biggest problem was an antiquated furnace that burned a hole in their finances with energy bills that averaged \$800 a month during the winter.

In December 2007 Joe lost his job as a store manager at Au Bon Pain in Queens. The best opportunity he could find in a sinking economy was a part-time position at a staffing agency in downtown Manhattan. He supplemented this income with gigs as a freelance photographer. The money, however, was less than his previous job. At the same time, the cost of utilities started to rise. The couple, which had never struggled to pay their bills before, began to fall behind on rent.

The family applied for food stamps and medical aid in May 2008. “We were holding out,” Franceska says, “hoping that we could catch up on the rent.” She made repeated trips to the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the city department in charge of administering Public Assistance, in an attempt to obtain rental assistance. Her efforts resulted in a one-time payment of their gas-and-electric bill.

DARK TIMES

In October 2008, Con Edison cut off their electricity. The family lived without power for two weeks. Realizing they had exhausted all their options, Franceska and Joe packed a couple of suitcases. The evening of Oct. 17,

the couple and their three children traveled to the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) office in the South Bronx, the city’s sole intake center for families seeking emergency shelter. Franceska and Joe were fingerprinted, photographed and entered in a database. They were now officially homeless.

THE NEW HOMELESSNESS

Families who were once barely getting by have been pushed into homelessness by the economic recession, says Ralph da Costa Nunez, president of the Institute for Children and Poverty, a nonprofit that studies family homelessness. According to the Coalition for the Homeless, from July to November 2008, more than 1,300 new families entered New York City’s shelter system each month, the highest monthly average since the city began recording this data 25 years ago.

“There are some families that are here because of chronic poverty issues,” Nunez says. “Some are here because something happened and they couldn’t pay the rent.” He calls this growing population the “new homeless.” “These are people that were middle class, that had jobs, that had no other options.”

“When I first went into the shelter, I thought I could stay there and work and get out,” Franceska says. DHS had placed the family in the Metro Family Residence on Queens Boulevard, a 45-minute subway ride from the elementary school where Zach attended first grade. Nearby was Nick’s pre-school, which also provided day care for Eden.

The kids thought they were in a hotel, so Franceska told them, “Listen, we’re homeless. We don’t have a home right now, but

we’re going to get one and things are going to get better.” She laughs, “After a while, they started asking, ‘When are we going to get one?’”

A month into the family’s residency, Franceska said that DHS determined the family’s unit was “too small” and relocated them late one night to the Flushing Family Residence in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

The family’s new unit looked like it had just been evacuated by the previous family. “There was literally someone’s taco dinner still on the kitchen table,” Franceska says. Cockroaches were crawling out of a box of bed sheets. On the inside of the front door, someone had scrawled the word “bitch.”

“It was at that point I felt like I had no control over my life situation anymore,” Franceska says.

‘NO CONTROL’

The shelter’s location in Brooklyn presented another problem for the family. Upon the advice of the city’s Board of Education, Franceska decided to keep her children enrolled in Queens. This meant a two-hour subway trip requiring two transfers. Franceska asked the city to provide her children with direct transportation to and from school, arguing that not only was the commute arduous, but Nick had difficulty walking due to a developmental disorder. But the city was not able to coordinate her children’s transportation. Instead, the shelter issued Franceska a MetroCard with the stipulation that it be used only for the school commute.

The early morning commute is “exhausting,” Franceska says. Zach was often late to school. Some days, when the weather was

bad, she paid \$25 of her benefit money for a 45-minute taxi ride.

By December, Franceska and Joe’s marriage had deteriorated. A month later, at Franceska’s request, he moved out of the shelter.

Living in the shelter “became harder after their dad left,” Franceska says of her children, especially for Zach, who started seeing a school counselor once a week. On top of this, the family had been chronically ill since moving to Bushwick. “We were throwing up a lot. The kids were missing school a lot,” Franceska says. It did not help that the shelter lacked a medical facility.

A few months ago, Zach became seriously ill. Franceska moved all three children to a friend’s house. The next morning Franceska left Nick and Eden with her friend and took Zach to Flushing Hospital Medical Center where the emergency room admitted him for “acute gastritis.” He was released the following morning after his condition stabilized.

Franceska returned to the Flushing Family Residence that evening with her children. Everyone was tired and eager to relax. But the family did not make it past the front desk. The Dillella children had been out of the shelter for 48 hours, the guard told Franceska, which violated shelter rules. As a result, the whole family had been “locked out of the DHS system.” Franceska explained that she had not been aware of the rule. It did not matter, the guard told her. There was nothing for her to do except to return to PATH in the Bronx and reapply.

Continued on page 19



TICKET TO NOWHERE

Homeless families eager to move into permanent housing often encounter an immediate obstacle: The vast majority of landlords and brokers refuse to accept the city’s Department of Homeless Services Work Advantage voucher, a limited-time rental subsidy introduced by the Bloomberg administration in 2007.

“You are not going to find an apartment with the Work Advantage voucher for the voucher’s amount,” says Linda Contes, an advocate with the direct action group Picture the Homeless. Contes, who has been living in a shelter with her husband since August 2008, says it took her months before she found a landlord willing to accept the couple’s \$962 monthly voucher — but he would only take it on the condition that the Contes pay him an additional \$300 a month. The couple agreed to the terms.

Contes says these kinds of arrangements, known as “side deals,” are illegal. They are also unavoidable. “[Landlords] know that people coming out of the shelters will do that because these people want to get out of the shelters.”

The terms of Work Advantage further constrain a family’s options by requiring that they move into the first available apartment, no matter where they lived before becoming homeless. If a family takes too long to find a place, the city either revokes the voucher or places the family in “any apartment it finds,” Contes says, “and regardless of your needs.”

The city’s rental assistance expires after two years. As a result, says Contes, families that have not been able to shore up their finances often find themselves back where they started: in a shelter.

— S.S.

FROZEN IN TIME: Franceska Dillella, mother of three, finds a moment to smile. PHOTO COURTESY: FRANCESKA DILLELLA

A Day in the Life

Francesca Dillella is a working mother with three kids: six-year-old Zach, four-year-old Nick and two-year-old Eden. For eight months, she struggled to keep her family together while contending with the city's homeless shelter system. Here is an example of a typical day:

6:00a.m.
At the Stockholm Family Residence in Bushwick, Brooklyn, Francesca wakes up the kids, gets them dressed and fixes breakfast.

7:30a.m.
Francesca and her children head out the door to catch the M train from Central Avenue to Essex Street, where they switch to the F train. They take the F train one stop to Second Avenue and transfer to the V train. The family disembarks at the Steinway Street station in Astoria, Queens, and walks to Zach's elementary school.

8:30a.m.
The school day starts. Zach is often late for first grade because of the long commute, which can take up to two hours.

9:00a.m.
After dropping off Zach, Francesca takes Nick to his pre-kindergarten school nearby, which also provides day care for Eden.

9:30a.m.
Francesca gets on the N train to travel to her job in Manhattan's Lower East Side.

10:00a.m.-4:30p.m.
Francesca works, but often has to attend mandatory meetings at the office of the Human Resources Administration located in Sunnyside, Queens, where she has waited up to four hours to meet with a case worker.

4:30p.m.
Francesca heads back to Astoria to pick up the kids, who get out of after-school day care at 5:30 p.m. The family then makes the long commute back to the shelter.

7:00p.m.-8:00p.m.
The family eats dinner. Francesca helps Zach with his homework.

8:00p.m.
Francesca often goes to a friend's house to use the Internet for her job. The shelter has no computer and the public library closes at 6 p.m.

10:00p.m.-11:00p.m.
The family must check into the shelter before its 11 p.m. curfew. Francesca puts the kids to bed.



Three Kids, No Home

Navigating the shelter system one step at a time.

(ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT) GETTING STARTED: Francesca Dillella and her daughter Eden share breakfast at a homeless shelter in Bushwick, Brooklyn. PHOTO COURTESY: FRANCESCA DILLELLA

UPHILL STRUGGLE: The morning commute to Astoria, Queens, where Francesca's children

attend school and day care requires two subway transfers. The city's Department of Homeless Services was unable to provide the family with school transportation.

PATIENCE: The family waits at the Central Avenue subway station in Bushwick for the M train.

(BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT) MADONNA AND CHILD: "It's not easy for anyone to say they are homeless," Francesca says, "especially children."

TIME FOR CLASS: Zach arrives at his elementary school in Astoria. He has missed a number of school days this year due to poor health.

The Young and Homeless

A record number of families are flooding New York City's emergency homeless shelters. In February 2009, there were more than 9,600 families in the city's shelter system, the highest number since New York City began tracking this data 25 years ago.

A local economy plagued by job losses and home foreclosures guarantees that these numbers will only rise, writes Patrick Markee, senior policy analyst at the nonprofit Coalition for the Homeless. Since June 2008, the number of New York City families in homeless shelters has increased by 12 percent.

"Your typical family today is a single mother with two or three kids," says Ralph da Costa Nunez, president of the Institute for Children and Poverty. "Your typical homeless person is a child and the majority of homeless children are aged 6 or below. They are very young, and that's because their parents are very young."

BY THE NUMBERS:

- According to the Coalition for the Homeless, children account for nearly 15,500 of the city's total shelter population of about 36,000. Throughout the course of the fiscal year 2009, approximately 34,000 different children slept in city shelters for at least one night.
- Long commutes, frequent absences and repeated school transfers cause homeless children to struggle academically.
- 23 percent of all homeless school-aged children repeat a grade. 75 percent perform below grade level in reading, while 54 percent perform below grade level in math.
- The health of homeless children often suffers from a combination of unsanitary shelter conditions, poor access to healthcare and chronic stress.
- 46 percent of New York City's homeless children experience a decline in health after entering shelters. These children get three times as many gastrointestinal disorders and 50 percent more ear infections than non-homeless children, and they are hospitalized twice as often.
- 23 percent of the city's homeless children often go hungry.
- 41 percent of homeless children suffer from psychological conditions.

Source: *A Shelter is Not A Home... Or Is It? Lessons from Family Homelessness in New York City*, by Ralph da Costa Nunez (White Tiger Press, 2004).



IRAN TEETERS ON THE EDGE OF HISTORY

By JOHN TARLETON ★

Since the late 19th century, Iranians have repeatedly rebelled against tyranny at home and domination from abroad. Thirty years ago, the cries of “*Allah-u-Akbar!*” often filled the air in the capitol city of Tehran as the Iranian Revolution gained momentum amid strikes and mass street protests. The uprising would ultimately sweep the U.S.-backed Shah out of power and establish an Islamic Republic. Now, the same cry of “God is great!” can be heard nightly from Tehran’s rooftops as millions of Iranians push back against their rulers following a contested presidential election and a searing week of protests in June that left at least 17 dead and hundreds injured at the hands of government police and paramilitaries. While it is impossible to say for certain who won the June 12 election, there is currently both a freedom movement from below and a power struggle from above pitting fundamentalist theocrats against elite business interests that want to reintegrate Iran into the global economy. With the Iranian uprising rapidly unfolding on YouTube videos and Twitter feeds of uncertain origins, anything from a continued smothering of dissent to a general strike to a bloody crackdown seems possible.



INSIDE THE POLITICAL MACHINE

Formed shortly after the 1979 revolution that overthrew the Shah, the Islamic Republic permits popular participation while guaranteeing clerical rule. Conservative traditionalists and liberalizing reformers vie for the presidency and parliament in regular elections, but an unelected Council of Guardians screens candidates for office and can veto any law passed by parliament that it deems inappropriate. At the top of the Iranian system sits the Supreme Leader who controls the security forces and whose pronouncements are supposed to be the final word in matters of state. Under the doctrine of *Vilayet-e Faqih* (“Rule of the Just Jurisprudent”), the Supreme Leader is supposed to be a pious and fair-minded guardian of a society governed by Islamic law. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was chosen as Supreme Leader by an 86-man Assembly of Experts following the 1989 death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic’s founder. Composed entirely of Islamic scholars, the Assembly of Experts can dismiss the Supreme Leader if a majority of its members decide he is no longer suited for the job.

Five Leaders to Watch

Iranian politics have been dominated for three decades by the leaders who came to power in the 1979 revolution. Here are five figures to watch:

SUPREME LEADER AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI

Khamenei served as President of Iran during much of the 1980s. He was chosen over other more senior clerics by Ayatollah Khomeini to be his successor shortly before Khomeini died in 1989, a source of resentment for some in Iran’s religious establishment. Known as a deft political operator who has been able to balance Iran’s competing power centers, Khamenei is believed to have especially strong ties to the Revolutionary Guards and other security forces. As Supreme Leader, Khamenei has the final say in all affairs of state, but the day-to-day management of the country is left to the president and his ministers.



PRESIDENT MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD

Reviled by critics as a populist demagogue, Ahmadinejad has built a substantial following among Iran’s poor and rural inhabitants with a combination of nationalism, religiosity, personal austerity and a variety of economic subsidies. Ahmadinejad is a strong proponent of Iran’s nuclear program and has drawn criticism in the West for questioning the Holocaust and for his verbal attacks on Israel. Speaking at Columbia University in Sept. 2007, Ahmadinejad denied there were any gays in Iran. Ahmadinejad was first elected president in 2005 and according to official results, was re-elected with 63 percent of the vote.

MIR-HOSSEIN MOUSAVI

Mousavi emerged from two decades in political retirement this spring to challenge Ahmadinejad for Iran’s presidency. As the candidate of “change,” Mousavi vowed to speed up the privatization of state-owned businesses and end Iran’s international isolation. Mousavi attracted passionate support from women and young people who have chafed under the Islamic Republic’s repressive social mores. An architect by training, Mousavi was Iran’s Prime Minister from 1981 until the position was abolished in 1989. As Prime Minister, Mousavi guided Iran’s economy through the war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988. Thousands of political prisoners, many of them leftists, were executed by the Iranian government during Mousavi’s time in office. Mousavi was a rival of Khamenei during the 1980s and withdrew from politics after Khamenei became Supreme Leader.



ALI AKBAR HASHEMI RAFSANJANI

A strong supporter of Mousavi, and son of a pistachio farmer, this billionaire cleric is a leading voice for business interests who want to end Iran’s international isolation and scrap Ahmadinejad’s populist economic policies. He also heads the 86-man Assembly of Experts, the only body in Iran that has the power to replace the Supreme Leader. Rafsanjani is perceived by many Iranians as having enriched himself and his family during his two terms as president from 1989 to 1997. Rafsanjani was trounced when he ran for the presidency against Ahmadinejad in 2005. Among his many holdings, Rafsanjani controls Iran’s largest private university system, which has 1.3 million students and played a key role in mobilizing support for Mousavi’s campaign.



GRAND AYATOLLAH HOSSEIN ALI MONTAZERI



When Montazeri announced June 16 that, “no one in their right mind can believe” in the official election results, protesters gained the support of one of Iran’s most revered religious leaders. Architect of the Islamic Republic’s constitution, Montazeri, 87, was the designated heir to Ayatollah Khomeini until he angered Khomeini with criticisms of Iran’s human rights abuses. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was subsequently selected as the Supreme Leader. A prolific writer, Montazeri has advocated greater democratic freedoms and rights for women. He was under house arrest from 1997 to 2003.

IRAN AND THE WEST

When anti-government protests broke out in Iran, supporters of the regime immediately fingered the United States and Britain as culprits based on a long history of Anglo-American intervention.

1890-1892 Unpopular concessions on tobacco and other products to the British lead prominent Shi’ite clerics to call for nationalist protests and a nationwide tobacco strike, which succeed in forcing the canceling of the concession.

1908 The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company is founded when the British discover massive oil reserves in what is now southwestern Iran. Iran initially receives only 16 percent of the profits.

1941 Iranian monarch Reza Pahlavi is deposed by the British and his young son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi is anointed as the Iran’s figurehead leader.

1953 Iran’s democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh is deposed in a coup jointly orchestrated by the CIA and British intelligence. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi is restored as Iran’s absolute ruler, or Shah. Mossadegh had angered British and U.S. oil interests by nationalizing Iran’s oil reserves the previous year. The Shah becomes a key U.S. ally in the Middle East. During his reign, tens of thousands of dissidents are killed and tortured by the SAVAK secret police which was trained, and equipped, by the United States.

1978-1979 Massive street protests force the Shah from power in one of the great revolutionary upheav-

als of the 20th century. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returns from exile to establish an Islamic Republic in which religious law guides all aspects of public and private life.

1979-1981 Iranian students seize the U.S. embassy in Tehran and take 52 American hostages. The 444-day hostage crisis sparks an outpouring of anti-Iranian rage in the United States, but is wildly popular in Iran. A treasure trove of documents recovered in the embassy reveal extensive, long-standing ties between the SAVAK and the CIA.

1980-88 Iraq’s Saddam Hussein invades Iran with U.S. encourage-

ment. When Iraq’s war effort falters, the Reagan administration supplies billions of dollars in military and financial assistance to Hussein’s government, including chemical weapons that are used against the Iranians. U.S. forces also destroy two vital Iranian oil platforms, effectively shutting down Iran’s entire oil industry.

1988 A U.S. warship shoots down an unarmed Iranian passenger airliner over the Persian Gulf, killing all 290 people on board. The Iran-Iraq War ends in a stalemate. At least 500,000 people are killed in the war. Both countries are weakened and left heavily in debt.

1990s The United States applies aggressive economic sanctions against Iran’s energy sector that continue to this day.

2003-2008 Fears of a U.S. military attack grow in Iran after President George W. Bush lumps Iran into the “Axis of Evil” with Iraq and North Korea and then invades and occupies Iraq with 140,000 troops. Iran continues development of its nuclear energy program much to the dismay of the United States and Israel. A July 2008 report by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reveals that the Bush administration has authorized spending as much as \$400 million on covert operations in Iran.

—J. T.

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Obama’s Tortured Logic

By ALEX KANE

When President Barack Obama, in his first days in office, directed the military commissions at Guantánamo Bay to be suspended, pledged to shut the prison at Guantánamo by the beginning of next year and close the CIA’s secret prison sites around the world, many civil liberties and human rights activists breathed a sigh of relief.

Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), told the *New York Times* Jan. 22 that these steps “reaffirmed American values and are a ray of light after eight long, dark years.”

Now, nearly six months into the Obama administration, the president has continued on the George W. Bush administration’s track on national security policy, making a mockery of his campaign promises to be transparent and adhere to the rule of law.

Refusing to consider prosecuting Bush administration officials for war crimes, to refusing to release photos of detainee abuse and torture, President Obama and Eric Holder’s U.S. Department of Justice have disappointed many of those same civil liberties and human rights activists.

The Independent recently caught up with Romero, the first Latino and openly gay director of the ACLU.

ALEX KANE: *First, give your overall assessment of President Obama’s policies on torture and national security.*

ANTHONY ROMERO: Well, I think that the President has made a clear break with George Bush. It was remarkable that, when he first took office, his first three executive orders dealt with the closure of the Guantánamo base, the closure of the secret prisons and unequivocally rejecting the use of torture and abusive interrogation techniques. That was a civil liberties trifecta on day one. It’s troubling, though, because it’s not been all linear.

Now we hear talk that, while the President does indeed intend to close Guantá-

namo, he is keen on keeping some form of the military commissions going forward. We think that keeping any form of the military commissions going forward is a huge mistake. They haven’t worked, the rules are rigged, they have preordained outcomes, individuals have been held often without charge, or without access to lawyers for years, and there’s no way to fix that mess.

It’s troubling to hear, especially most recently, that the President is also considering the need for what he calls a “preventive detention regime” that would allow the government, essentially, to hold individuals indefinitely without charge or conviction.

That just doesn’t happen in America. In the America we know, you can only hold someone or detain someone if you can show that they are guilty of criminal conduct, and not some vague or amorphous sense of there being a threat to national security.

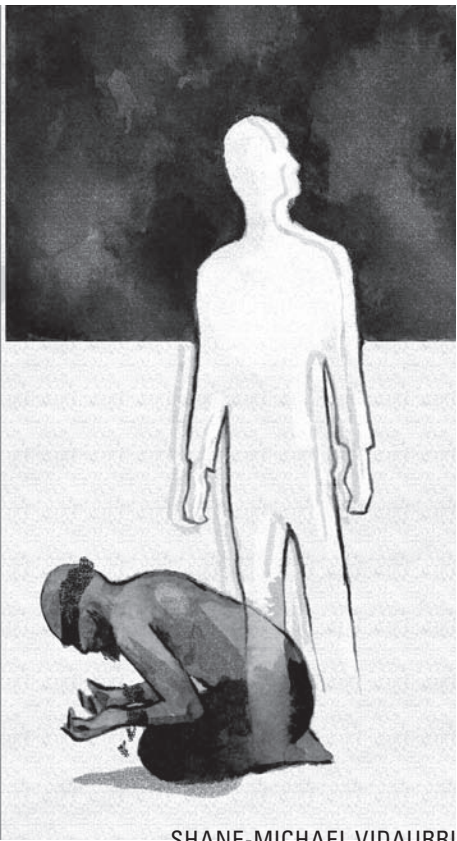
And that’s why I’ve been saying consistently that, even though we have a very different president with a very different value system, that if he continues down the path of retaining some of the same policies of George Bush, the policies become his own. And they then become the Bush-Obama doctrine.

AK: *In a couple of cases, like the Binyam Mohammed lawsuit against a subsidiary of Boeing, the Obama Justice Department has invoked the “state secrets” privilege, basically echoing the Bush administration.*

AR: Yeah, those were probably the early indications of what was going to be trouble on the horizon. It was literally a week after Attorney General Holder took office that we were on the 9th Circuit on the Jeppesen Data Plan case, the one that you referenced, that we brought against a Boeing subsidiary for providing the essential flight services for individuals who were rendered overseas and tortured.

And we were thunderstruck when the Justice Department lawyer, under the new attorney general, got up in court and mouthed the exact same words of the Bush Justice Department. And we howled, and properly so. We said, “This is not change, this is more of the same.” This effort to obfuscate a government policy and government action because of their embarrassing or illegal nature is inappropriate under the use of the “state secrets” doctrine. The “state secrets” doctrine is not an immunity doctrine; it’s an evidentiary privilege that applies very surgically, narrowly to pieces of evidence that might jeopardize national security, but it can’t be used as a wholesale way to immunize government officials from litigation.

AK: *The Obama administration’s reversal on releasing pictures of abuse and torture in prisons in Iraq infuriated many, and reports have come out contradicting the Pentagon’s claim that the photos don’t show sexual abuse, rape and sodomy.*



SHANE-MICHAEL VIDAURRI

AR: Look, no one wants to see the photos. They’re going to be very disturbing, and they should be disturbing. The photos, however, are important to making sure that we have the political will to prosecute people for a crime.

And we have Vice President Cheney flying around the country, saying that “we do not torture,” and we know that is not the case. The photos will convincingly show the American public that under the Bush-Cheney watch, we did, in fact, torture. And then the question comes out, “What did we do about it?”

The fact is we have not prosecuted all the individuals responsible for the torture and abuse. President Obama is flatly wrong when he says, “We have conducted investigations and people have been punished.” This is something that happened systemically, across the theaters of war, and down the chain of command. And that’s why we need as much of the vigor and interest in prosecuting those crimes as we can muster.

To read the full interview, please visit independent.org.



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WEEKEND MARXISM WORKSHOP *Saturday, July 18–19, 25–26, 9:30AM - 6PM*
Marxism: A Revolutionary Cure for Capitalism’s Depression?
This is a 4-day intensive introduction to Marxism over two consecutive weekends.

REPORTBACK FROM GAZA AND THE WEST BANK *Tuesday, July 14, 6PM*
Invited speakers include: Medea Benjamin, Felice Gelmon, Manijeh Saba and Phil Weiss. Sponsors: Adalah-NY, The Brecht Forum, Code Pink, Committee for Open Discussion of Zionism, Jews Against the Occupation, Jews Say No!, Women in Black

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Pro-Development Legislation Repealed in Peru Following Indigenous Protests

By JACQUIE SIMONE

Thousands of indigenous Amazonian protesters in Peru succeeded in forcing the government to repeal legislation that would have increased foreign-led development plans and extractive industries, such as logging, oil drilling and mining.

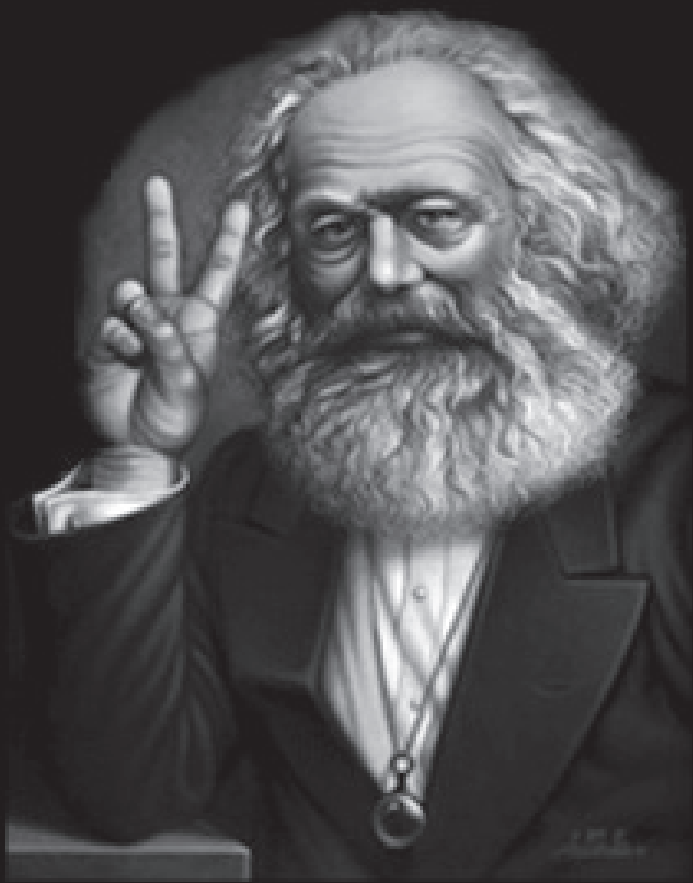
Indigenous Peruvians began blockading roads, rivers and railways April 9 to protest this legislation, which was passed to implement the 2007 U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement. Police forces attacked nonviolent protesters June 5 outside the city of Bagua, in the northern Peruvian Amazon. An estimated 60 indigenous protesters and 24 police officers were killed in the ensuing conflict.

Facing international criticism, the Peruvian

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Congress voted 82 to 12 to repeal the Forestry and Wildlife Law. The government also revoked a reform that permitted changes in land use without full prior consent of indigenous peoples. This means that indigenous groups have the right to be consulted before their traditionally held lands are developed.

For more information, visit upside-down-world.org.



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In making clear the inner workings of the capitalist system of wealth production and distribution, and the ways in which crises are endemic to the system, Marx and Engels also provided the methodology for critical theoretical explorations into every area of human activity from art criticism to the environment, from feminist theory to paleontology.

In addition, from their first appearance in the 19th century, these works have nourished movements for liberation of those classes called into being by capital, and now constituting the broadest mass of humanity, whose brutal exploitation remains the *sine qua non* of the capitalist system.

Poetic Tension

Poets For Palestine
EDITED BY REMI KANAZI
AL JISSER GROUP, 2008

There is often a fear among critics of literature that overtly “political” poetry, in trying to both educate and aesthetically please, will succeed at neither. While *Poets for Palestine* at times demonstrates the reason for such concerns, more often the collection acts as a testament to the role of art in bringing us into the emotional, meditative and metaphorical landscapes of a people facing injustice.

The anthology was compiled and edited by Palestinian-American poet and journalist Remi Kanazi and features works by several Palestinian poets, as well as writers of other nationalities including Syrians, Lebanese and Sudanese. While focusing on the continued occupation of Palestine, the poets take on social justice struggles around the world. The range of voices and topics represents how, in Kanazi’s words, “the basic appeal for justice ... transcends designations such as Arab and Christian and black. It is a fundamentally, irreducibly human appeal.” Palestinian artwork, often depicting — realistically or abstractly — conditions under Israeli occupation, is reprinted throughout the anthology.

While the inclusion of spoken word poetry broadens the anthology’s stylistic scope, these poems tend to illustrate the grounds for critics’ fears of political poetry. For instance, Nizar Wattad’s (a.k.a Ragtop) “Free the P” is essentially a list of injustices, stylistically connected through the use of alliteration, such as “Politicians getting Paid to Put People in Prison.” There is no unique perspective offered here, nor concrete details or metaphor to make one viscerally feel the impact of these injustices. In addition, nothing particularly interesting happens on the level of form.

The same criticism can be leveled at the succession of rhyming couplets (the standard *aabbccdd* rhyme scheme that is often the basis for spoken word poetry) in the N.O.M.A.D.S. “Moot.” These spoken word pieces, including Junichi P. Semitsu’s “Palestine in Athens,” in which the speaker states, “I want the Olympic Congregation/to recognize a nation/named/Palestine,” offer didactic and singular messages, which, like protest slogans, get the point across clearly, but are neither intellectually nor aesthetically very interesting. If these poems seem one-dimensional, it could be in part because the other dimensions cannot be expressed on the page. The listener at a spoken word performance could have a very different experience than the reader. Perhaps a CD should have been included with the anthology, or recordings of the poems made available online.

This shows how difficult it is to write artistically about social injustices, and gives all the more

reason to marvel at the many successful poems in this anthology. For instance, in Hayan Charara’s “Hamza Aweiwi, a Shoemaker in Hebron,” the reader is introduced to a man who “admits he does not wash his clothes” and a young girl who “knows grown men/should not smell this way.” We are not told this is unjust, we literally smell it, reminding us that politics is not above life, but rather is life.

There are also poems that make declarations in powerful and non-didactic ways, like Naomi Shihab Nye’s “Kindness.” “Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,/you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.” Nye’s work here is reminiscent of the great Persian mystic poets like Hafez and Rumi, offering profound and layered messages with simple statements. Also bordering on the mystical, though in a far more contemporary way, Mahmoud Darwish’s poems in this anthology show why he was, and continues to be, so beloved in Palestine and throughout the world (his 2008 funeral was attended by thousands of Palestinians). In his poem “Another Day Will Come,”

he presents a simple yet profound vision of the future (presumably free of occupation): “later/we will grow older. We have enough time/to grow older after this day...”

The voices of the concerned people outside the occupation of Palestine deliver a powerful impact. American poet Philip Metres shows a compassionate awareness in “Letter to My Sister,” in which he describes a photograph in a newspaper: “a staggering crowd, arms entwined/and straining, as if to hold something back./It could be us, facing danger constantly/off-screen. No, we were born here.”

There are, as well, poems by a few notable Jewish-American poets, such as Kathy Engel, Alicia Ostriker and Marilyn Hacker. Unfortunately, however, none of these poets really engages the tension between the Jewish people’s history of victimization and a Jewish state that uses that history to justify its oppressive policies.

Regardless, this anthology deserves to be recognized as an important book, all the more so because its contentious subject matter makes it likely to be ignored for review in most (if not all) mainstream publi-

cations. The anthology provides an important service of introducing more Western readers (particularly in the Palestinian rights activist community in the United States) to the writing of Middle Eastern poets, many of whom are not widely translated into English. Yes, some of the poems could not quite carry the burden of their difficult subject matter. But these slip easily from memory, while the poems that tackle social injustice artfully, inspiring us with the human necessity to create, despite some of the most inhuman acts and conditions imaginable, are difficult to forget.

—JACOB SCHEIER

Jacob Scheier is the author of the poetry collection More to Keep us Warm (ECW Press), which was awarded Governor General’s Literary Award for Poetry in 2008 by the Canada Council for the Arts.

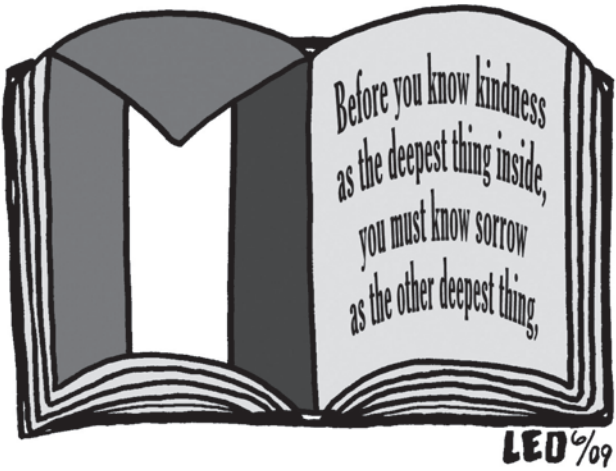
Remi Kanazi will be performing on two upcoming dates: June 29, 7p.m. at Millennium Film Workshop, and July 23, 7:30p.m. at The Brecht Forum. For more information, visit poeticinjustice.netjustice.net

Palestinian Identity

By Remi Kanazi

*I was born overseas
A refugee
With little knowledge of myself or my ancestry
Growing up in American society
I conformed to the mentality
I watched MTV
Envied actors and people who drove Mercedes
I didn’t listen to Public Enemy or read Edward Said
Comprehend the need for autonomy
I was a dark kid, trying to be a white kid, acting like a black kid
In my middle-class economy
But my mom didn’t speak this language perfectly
And I was reminded with certainty
My name wasn’t Ali or Punjabi MC
Not Khalid, Rashid, or anyone from Aladdin’s family
I was just me*

Published in *Poets for Palestine* and reprinted with permission.



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The Rhyme Is Mightier than the Sword

By JAISAL NOOR

Innovation in mainstream rap means new ways to rhyme the same four-letter words, fresh ways to degrade women or the invention of new epithets to use against homosexuals. While so-called “conscious” hip-hop has proliferated in recent years, it often lacks raw emcee skills or production quality. This makes die-hard fans who are also politically progressive cringe and think twice before breaking the cellophane off the latest album.

Such fears are already buried by the time the intro track ends and “Vietnam,” the first song in The Narcicyst’s new self-titled album, begins. When the bass line kicks and the Narcicyst tears into the first verse you might have already forgotten the last dozen tracks you heard on the radio that nearly made you vomit. The horns and violins — which could have been recorded by Miri Ben Ari, hip-hop’s premier violinist — are mixed with a hard-hitting beat that you can’t keep your head from bumping to. The production is reminiscent of a mix between Kanye West and Jedi Mind Tricks’ producer Stoupe the Enemy of Mankind — two of hip-hop’s finest.

Palestinian singer Shadia Mansour’s exquisite voice graces the track “Hamdulillah” (Arabic for “Be Thankful to God, Thank you God”) and The Narcicyst, a.k.a. Yassin Alsalman, lays down smooth rhymes. In the track “P.H.A.T.W.A.” which has an accompanying music video, the Canadian-Iraqi Alsalman is racially profiled, detained and threatened at an airport while entering the United States. Yet he somehow manages to turn the experience into something humorous. It might even make you laugh before realizing that the song could be based on the rapper’s personal experiences (minus the hooded Guantánamo prisoners in orange jumpsuits doing the doo-wop while The Narcicyst gets interrogated). “Iraqi Prime Time News” and the track “Sumeria” with the hook: “My only love is the land of Sumeria/Where my grandma was buried in” gives insight to some-

one of Iraqi descent being a helpless observer to the destruction of their four thousand year old civilization.

Going farther than his previous releases, the album also tastefully delves into the rapper’s personal life, including the loss of loved ones and even his relationship with his wife. And yes, completely absent from the album are the word “bitch,” threats to homosexuals and promises to wipe out the residents of nearby neighborhoods. A practicing Muslim, Alsalman reveals himself as a peace advocate.

Lyricaly, The Narcicyst holds down the entire album, flowing on beat while staying original and keeping his rhymes fresh. *The Narcicyst* is the rapper’s ninth album. His versatile rhymes match the diverse beats from his eight different producers (including himself). No two tracks sound alike. Some listeners may not appreciate the diversity and leave the album craving more bangers like “Vietnam,” but all will feel they’ve gotten their money’s worth: out of 19 tracks, there are at least a dozen quality songs. Some even remind you why you fell in love with hip-hop all those years back.

Jaisal Noor of *The Independent* recently caught up with Yassin Alsalman to talk about music and politics:

JAISAL NOOR: *One of the major topics you cover in your music are conflicts in the Middle East. And you also talk about your personal experiences — the animosity that you face on a daily basis as someone of Arab descent. How do you turn that into something positive?*

YASSIN ALSALMAN: If I was to get violent, then I would be doing exactly what the system wants me to do and at the same time continuing a long legacy of mistakes on a human level. Hamdidillah, I have never been through war, but I have family members who have. So, the way I stay non-violent is by writing. As much as that doesn’t do that much to change things, it’s the least and the most I can do. As anyone else, if I got punched in the face I would try to punch someone

back in the face. But I don’t believe violence is the answer against the system because the system will use that against you in the long run. As the Prophet said, the pen is mightier than the sword.

JN: *You have several tracks that deal with the way society looks upon Arabs and people of Middle Eastern descent.*

YA: [The story in the] My P.H.A.T.W.A. video really happened. I combined three different trips to the United States for the video. I have been held at borders for three hours and questioned; and they went through my computer and all my stuff and asked me to write down people’s names, why I am doing this, why my mother is a teacher, and why my father is an architect. They strip you of anything that you know and make you paranoid. I haven’t faced the worst of it, but with my artwork I would like to be able to shed light on these things that happen and show people how ridiculous this shit is. It’s so ridiculous to be profiled know-

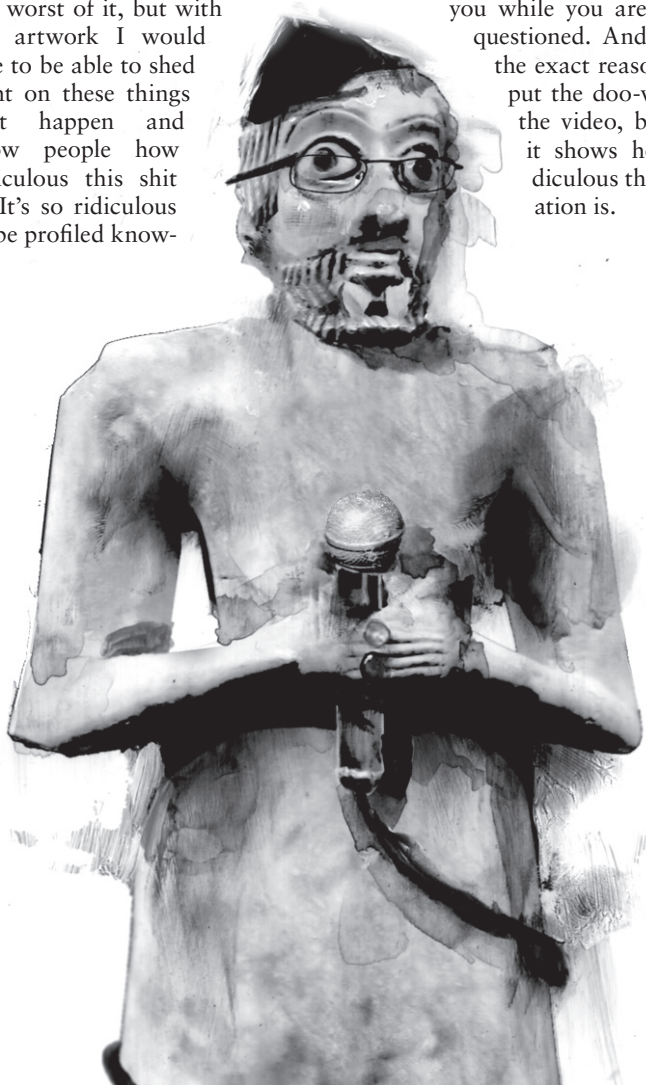
“If I was to get violent, then I would be doing exactly what the system wants me to do and at the same time continuing a long legacy of mistakes on a human level. ... I have never been through war, but I have family members who have. So, the way I stay non-violent is I write.”

ing that the white guy in front of me, the black guy behind me and the Mexican guy behind him didn’t have to go through what I just went through. It’s obvious that it’s a racist thing, but you are telling me it’s not a race thing. It’s just as ridiculous as a guy from Guantánamo doing the doo-wop behind you while you are being questioned. And that’s the exact reason. We put the doo-wop in the video, because it shows how ridiculous this situation is.

JN: *You included several humiliating experiences at airports in your video, which is actually hilarious. Can you go through that process with us?*

YA: I leave those situations drained but I almost can’t believe what just happened — that was a joke right? Because they will do all that shit and they’ll ask you ludicrous questions and fingerprint you and pat you down, and go through all your bags and then say, “You’re allowed into the States, no problem.” Initially when it happens, you are really vexed. But later on you realize how silly it was. I wanted to show people in the video that number one, despite all these things we go through, you can’t bring us down. You can’t make us feel like we aren’t anything, because we know what our worth is as human beings, and as a culture. And number two, [the video] is funny to the point of discomfort, like when the Israeli officer comes in the room and says, “Why don’t you tase him already?” and the guard says, “The Palestinian is in the other room bro.” When I premiered it, I’ve seen people laugh, but at the same time [they] experience this almost guilty discomfort for laughing. That’s exactly why we did this, because it’s really not a joke.

To listen to the full interview with previews of the tracks mentioned, visit indypendent.org.



DAVID HOLLENBACH

Across Continents, Across Generations

Across Generations: Immigrant Families in America
EDITED BY NANCY FONER
NYU PRESS, 2009

BY KAREN YI

A 10-year-old daughter of an African immigrant falls during school recess in Washington, D.C., scraping her knee. School classmates run over to help — the girl’s knee is bleeding from the fall — but the teacher immediately interjects, “Don’t touch her, she is from Africa, you might get AIDS!”

Raised by his grandparents in El Salvador, Eduardo resents his parents’ decision to move to the United States without him. Working three jobs, his mother says she only wanted the best for him. Eduardo asks, “What do you think is worse, to share poverty here with my half-siblings and mother and father, or not having learned how to love them because I never saw them?”

These accounts are just a taste of the plethora of stories in *Across Generations: Immigrant Families in*

America, a collection of essays that unearth the generational and cultural tensions that divide immigrant families and the ties that bring them together. Editor Nancy Foner, together with 10 scholars (nine sociologists and one anthropologist), delves into this largely unexplored world, reminding us that there is more to immigrants than the one-dimensional image of the “hard worker” portrayed by mainstream culture. The book explores the immigrant family within a transnational context, analyzing the heavy impact of geo-political and societal forces.

Across Generations probes issues of marriage, education, parental pressures, family separation, discipline and legality across multiple ethnic groups now living in the United States. Divided into eight chapters, each with a different author, and an introduction written by Foner, the collection of short essays tackles particular topics within specific ethnic communities. The authors’ research is delivered through personal anecdotes, interviews with immigrants, statistics and historical context.

The essays, however, leave room for an updated discussion, failing to touch on hot-button issues such as the recession, deportation, workplace raids, race-based violence and the policing of youth.

The book instead focuses on long-standing political and social constructs that have deeply affected immigrant families behind closed doors. Instead of assessing the immediate effects of deportations, it looks at the long-term impact of legality on family unity; instead of examining the direct effect of sex trafficking in Asian communities, it looks at the cultural imprint of the hypersexualization of Filipinas on Filipina daughters. This approach reveals that U.S. policy not only has immediate but long-term and far-reaching consequences on immigrant families.

Another topic is the growing public interest in the children of immigrants, whose numbers make them hard to ignore. According to the Urban Institute, children of immigrants comprise about 20 percent of the nation’s school-aged children. And four out of five children born to immigrant parents were born in the United States, making them U.S. citizens.

Each chapter peels back a new layer of transgenerational tensions — dating, discipline, gender-based expectations and money — as children of immigrants are forced to make sense of two worlds, balancing notions of identity, culture and parental expectations.

A recurring theme is the parental pressure exerted on children to succeed and conform to cultural norms. But disobeying parents in immigrant families often has greater repercussions — children are seen as “non-ethnic,” “untraditional,” “rebellious” and “unauthentic” members of the community. In addressing parental pressures, author Min Zhou writes about the importance of ethnic institutions dealing with



the high expectations parents have for their kids and the need to mitigate generational and cultural differences. Zhou describes how cultural centers can help invert social marginalization and discrimination, giving children a space to assert their ethnic identity.

But for other communities, relief from these stresses is not so easily attained. JoAnn D’Alisera explains that, for the African immigrant community, children must cope with negative and stereotypical images of Africa as a “heart of darkness,” a “continent teeming with disease” and other “constructed images of the past.” The prevalent ideology used to legitimize the colonization of Africa — the belief that native Africans were “in need of civilizing” — persists today and undercuts ethnic pride among African immigrant communities. “Children become the sites upon which collective cultural memories, informed by competing master narratives about the past, are produced, reproduced and made manifest,” writes D’Alisera. What once provided a justification for imperialism now serves as popular discourse to subsume African ethnic identity.

The book provides many windows into domestic immigrant life, indirectly examining how more than 200 years of U.S. foreign policy — economic, social and political — affected waves of emigration into the United States. The hardships that both immigrants and successive generations face today must be understood as the aftermath of these policies which continue to this day. Although U.S. domestic policy has never adequately addressed these connections, *Across Generations* effectively analyzes these relationships, highlighting links between culture, family life and global inequalities.

While the book shies away from policy recommendations or direct critiques, the narrowly tailored ethnographic studies provide a sturdy base for future research into immigrant families, in particular into the children of immigrants. *Across Generations* is effective not so much in thrusting the immigration

debate forward, but in providing a new depth and dimension to immigrants. With a rare glimpse into immigrant family life, *Across Generations* captures the voices of people who are straddling two worlds and two generations.

The Independent caught up with Nancy Foner, editor of *Across Generations* and a professor of sociology at Hunter College, to talk about ways to address tensions and conflicts within immigrant families.

KAREN YI: Why is it so important to study and understand immigrant families through this transnational and transgenerational lens?

NANCY FONER: It’s important to look at immigrant families, period. Most social science people who study immigration don’t look at immigrant families. They look at the economy, they look at work, they look at neighborhoods, they look at schools. The family gets overlooked. Maybe it’s just taken for granted. But in fact, most people spend most of their time with their families — their family relations are key. Of course, there’s a recent interest in the children of immigrants. And to understand the experience of the children of immigrants, you need to understand their relations with their parents.

KY: You write that the immigrant family cannot be viewed in isolation. Can you comment on how the economic recession is impacting immigrant family relationships?

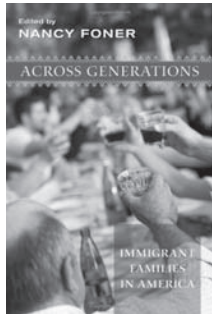
NF: It’s hard to say, because we don’t really know how the recession is affecting immigrants at all; there’s been almost no research.

KY: What do you think cities can do to better address these intergenerational conflicts and tensions?

NF: That’s hard. How does government intervene in personal relations and families? And some of the interventions are problematic. Agencies need to be culturally sensitive to different patterns and different groups but it’s tough. None of the chapters address policy implications in terms of what should be done. I see the role of the book as providing information about what goes on in different families. That will be useful, I hope, for policy makers, but it doesn’t lay out what they should do. But if they’re going to develop policies and programs, then they need to know what goes on within the groups, and that’s what the book provides.

KY: So, the book really sets the groundwork?

NF: Yes, because people don’t know about these groups. They don’t always appreciate what’s going on in immigrant families and how that differs and some of the strains and stresses for the children of immigrants. This is not something unique, but they are sometimes exacerbated by the fact that parents are coming from different cultures with different expectations and different standards. But also, there are very strong ties that bond generations together and I wanted to emphasize those. Those are some of the closest bonds that people have in their lives.



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Homelessness

Continued from page 9

“So I was there at PATH with my kids, showing them the hospital papers,” Franceska remembers. “I tell them, ‘My kid’s been hospitalized. Why don’t you just call the shelter and ask them if I can come back in?’” A case worker informed her that it was not possible. Because her family had been locked out of the Flushing residence, the computer system automatically assigned the unit to the next family on the waiting list.

Franceska says she called the DHS Office of Client Advocacy and asked for help. “We don’t do that,” the representative told her. “Client advocacy means that we explain DHS rules to you.”

BACK TO SQUARE ONE

Frustrated and exhausted, Franceska reapplied at PATH to re-enter the system. Having lost shelter during Zach’s brief illness, Franceska also lost her Public Assistance benefits. To regain them, she had to go through a second round of extensive paperwork and required meetings. The family was immediately assigned to a new home at the Stockholm Family Residence in Bushwick, about a mile from the Flushing residence.

“This is what the system has become,” says Nunez, who served as a deputy to the Mayor’s Office of Homelessness Services in the 1980s. The city holds residents to strict rules because it is “overwhelmed with homeless families,” he says. “If they can find a reason to throw somebody out, they will take it so they can make room again.”

“The reality is this system is uncontrolled. It is all over the place, and this woman is stuck in the middle of it,” Nunez says.

DHS and Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s office did not respond to repeated requests for comment by *The Independent*.

KEEPING HOPE ALIVE

Parenting responsibilities and an unpredictable routine, including frequent mandatory mid-day HRA appointments, have cost Franceska two jobs since she entered the shelter system last October. In March, she landed a position as an administrative assistant to the CEO of an artists cooperative in downtown Manhattan. The job paid only \$1,200 a month, but she enjoyed the work and felt as if she was developing a career. She began to save up for an apartment so she and her family could leave the shelter system.

The last week of April, Franceska received a notice from DHS announcing a new “income contribution program.” The policy required all working families living in municipal shelters to pay rent. The city determined that Franceska’s contribution would be \$450 a month, made payable to the Stockholm shelter.

Franceska was incredulous. “What are my choices?” she wondered. “Put my children in foster care so that I can work on my own and sleep on someone’s couch until I have money to get my own place? Is that the solution?”

She wrote the shelter a check for \$50, but refused to pay any more. Instead, she took her dissent directly to the city. Along with 15 other Stockholm parents and their children, Franceska and her children traveled to City Hall May 9 “to let the city know what we thought of its program.”

While she has “never been afraid to stand up against something that’s not right,” Franceska felt ashamed, she says, as she watched Zach march outside City Hall, his small hands holding up a sign that read, “Let my mom keep her income.”

“I want better for my children,” she says. “And I know that every family in there feels the same way.”

The rent program was immediately slammed by homeless advocacy groups and city officials, including

City Council member Tony Avella (D-Queens) and City Comptroller William Thompson, both mayoral candidates. Citing concerns over “technical issues,” DHS announced a temporary suspension of the rent program May 21.

MOVING ON, MOVING OUT

In March, Franceska qualified under the DHS Work Advantage program for a \$1,070 rental subsidy (see sidebar on page 9). After weeks of searching for an apartment on her own time, she found a broker willing “to deal with the city.” He had one listing: a two-family house in the East Bronx.

The apartment had only one bedroom and crumbling walls, but the landlord would accept Franceska’s city voucher, so she agreed to take it. That was when she learned that the rent was actually \$1,150 a month. “But that’s not what the lease is going to say,” the broker told her, explaining that she would have to pay the extra \$80 a month out-of-pocket.

Franceska says she is excited to be leaving the shelter. “My door. My lock,” she says More important, she adds, her kids will have a home again.

Yet the challenges ahead are daunting, says Linda Contes, an advocate with the nonprofit Picture the Homeless. The city’s voucher expires after two years. “Once her [Franceska’s] rental subsidy runs out, how is she going to maintain her apartment? How is she going to maintain her kids?”

Franceska, who recently became the manager of a SoHo gallery, says that she is hopeful about her and her children’s futures.

Reflecting on her time within the system, Franceska appreciates the housing and monetary assistance she did receive. Shea adds, however, “You can’t rely on this system. Just normal life becomes dysfunctional.”

Sexuality and Socialism



Sexuality and Socialism is a remarkably accessible analysis of many of the most challenging questions for those concerned with full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

Inside are essays on the roots of LGBT oppression, the construction of sexual and gender identities, the history of the gay movement, and how to unite the oppressed and exploited to win sexual liberation for all. Sherry Wolf analyzes different theories about oppression—including those of Marxism, postmodernism, identity politics, and queer theory—and challenges myths about genes, gender, and sexuality.

SHERRY WOLF is an associate editor of the *International Socialist Review*. She has written for publications including MRZine, CounterPunch, DissidentVoice, and *New Politics*, and speaks across the country on the struggle for LGBT liberation.

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THU JUL 2, 7PM • FREE

READING: MUSLIM PUNK. Author Michael Muhammad Knight will read from his new book, *Osama Van Halen*, the satirical follow-up to his cult underground classic, *The Taqwacores*, which helped spur the Taqwacore Muslim punk subculture. Knight’s work has been censored, boycotted and confiscated.

MON JUL 6, 7PM • FREE

READING: DRUG SOLUTION. Author Ryan Grim will read from his book, *This Is Your Country On Drugs*, which covers the causes and consequences of drugs trends, the policies of reactions from government and a new policy solution.

WED JUL 8, 7PM • FREE

READING/DISCUSSION: SEXPERIMENTS. Reverend Jen reads from his new book, *Live Nude Elf*, with guests Janeane Garofalo and Faceboy. The event will include performances from guests and be focused on Reverend Jen’s two years as a sex columnist and the many “sexperiments” that occurred.

WED JUL 15, 7PM • FREE

READING: LYRICAL DESIRE. New York City native Thomas Glave will read from his new book, *Torturer’s Wife*, which discuss dictatorships, war, anti-gay violence and secret fetishes. Glave specializes in experimenting lyrically with the topics of race and sexuality.

TUE JUL 21, 7PM • FREE

SCREENING/BOOK RELEASE PARTY: EXAMINED LIFE. Astra Taylor’s documentary portrays a series of contemporary philosophers such as Cornel West, Peter Singer and Judith Butler. join the release party for the companion book, *Examined Life: Excursions With Contemporary Thinkers*. Live musical performance from The Instruments.

Bluestockings Cafe and Bookstore hosts community events and readings every night. Please visit bluestockings.com for a full schedule and to purchase a gift card.



As the “Be Green” movement sweeps American culture, author Barry Sanders brings us back to reality. “Ironically, that greatest single assault on the environment, on all of us around the globe, comes from one agency, that one agency in business

to protect us from our enemies, the Armed Forces of the United States,” he writes. To read a Bryan Farrell’s interview with the author and a review of his new book, *The Green Zone: The Environmental Costs of Militarism*, check out indydependent.org.

ONLINE AT INDYPENDENT.ORG

reader comments Continued from page 2

PLAYTIME IS OVER

In response to “WBAI Bounces Back,” June 5:

WBAI has not been relevant for about 30 years. Tune it in on any given day and the programming doesn’t sound any different from what the station was doing back in the Margot Adler, Pepsi Charles, Bob Fass, James Irsay days. Only differences are the current personalities are cosmic dumb and the producers are watered-down losers. No wonder so few people have been supporters in the past decade. You’d think that during the Bush debacle and in its wake, that station would have plenty of gist to bring in significant listener numbers. The station hasn’t oper-

ated in the public interest to any significant extent for a generation, so Pacifica should sell it off to commercial interests and end the charade already.

—LASZLOSEVERANCE

JUST SAY NO.

In response to “Why the MTA Is Broken,” June 5:

The “industry standard” you cite is for small market transit systems with weak unions. And it’s a truly awful “industry standard” — like the unpaid swing shift where workers work 12 hours but only get paid for 8! And the proposal to eliminate live station agents who can help people perform a transaction with rent-a-cops who can’t

help you if you need change for the MetroCard vending machine is just ridiculous.

—GREGORY A. BUTLER

WHY NOT MOVE?

In response to “Peace Pentagon Faces Uncertain Future,” June 5:

Sell the building and buy a larger, nicer building at a convenient location in Brooklyn. This would enable the A.J. Muste Institute to purchase a superior facility with the proceeds of a sale in any market, the current building has no real advantages, and — most important — there is no other way forward.

—JOE C

BAMcinématek

@BAMRoseCinemas

Power to the People! Five years running, BAMcinématek and Afro-Punk bring the revolutionary spirit of July 4th to Brooklyn with seven days of film, music, and other events with themes of Black power, rebellion, and equality.

MOVIES: JULY 3—8

Highlights include:

Adjust Your Color: The Truth of Petey Greene about the original shock-jock who discussed racism, sex, and drug abuse uncensored on TV and radio.

The Anderson Platoon reveals the daily life of a single US platoon station in Vietnam. Screens with ***Fred Hampton: Black Panthers in Chicago***.

Attica, the Emmy award-winning documentary that recreates 1971's prison revolt at New York's Attica correctional facility.

Revolution '67, a chronicle of the violent riots that erupted in Newark after a black taxi driver was beaten to death by police.

The Night James Brown Saved Boston, a documentary exploring James Brown's concert in Boston the day after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination amid country-wide race riots.

The Two Towns of Jasper, a documentary detailing the brutal 1998 murder of James Byrd, Jr. in Jasper, Texas by members of the Aryan Nations.

PLUS a special tribute to Spike Lee and much more.

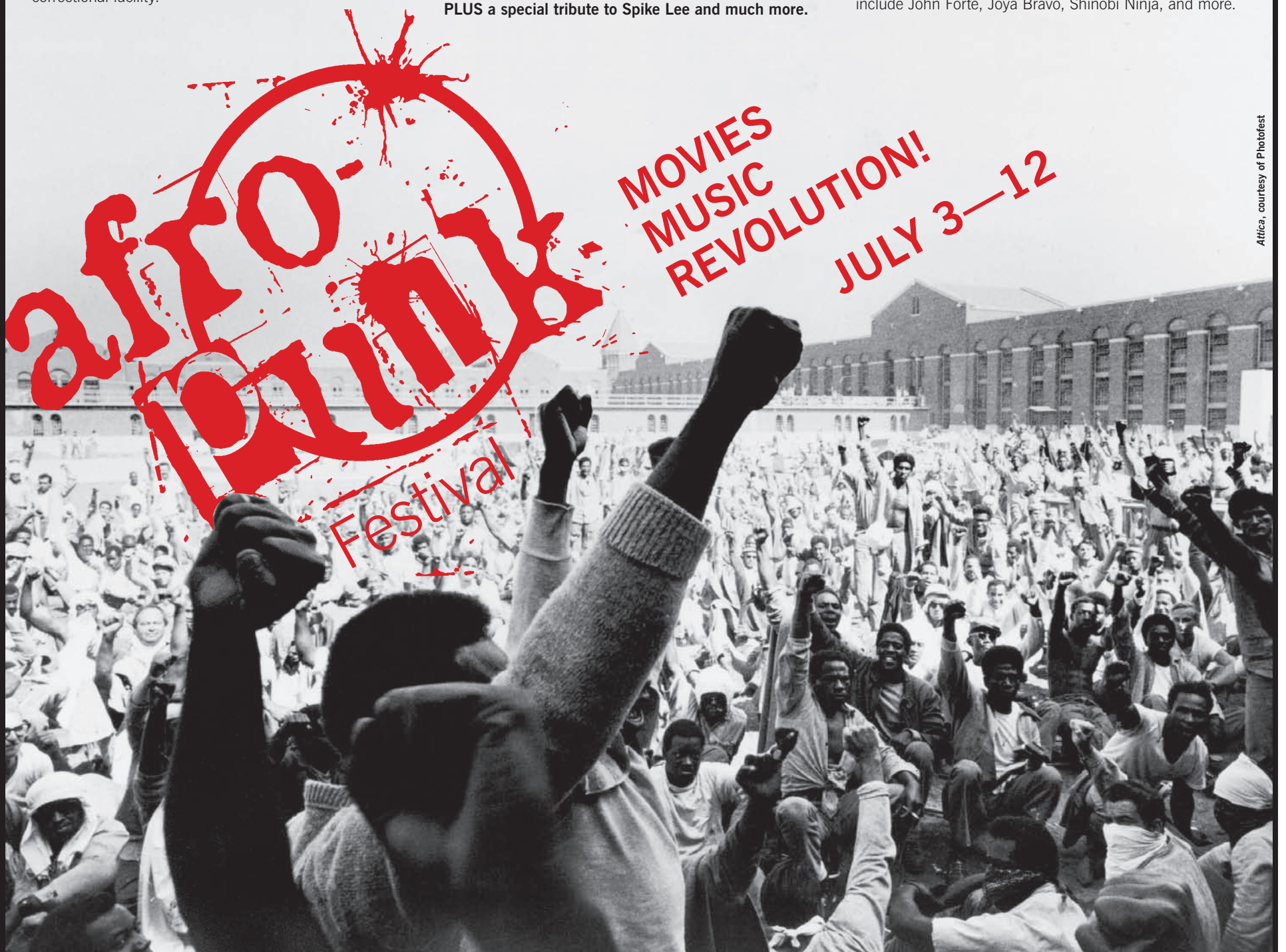
CONCERTS IN THE SKATE PARK: JULY 4—6

For the second year in a row the parking lot by BAM will be transformed into a killer skate park, complete with live music, skating and biking demonstrations, and more.

Live music acts include Janelle Monae, Saul Williams, Earl Grey Hound, Tamar Kali, Whole Wheat Bread, Game Rebellion, Apollo Heights, and more.

AFRO-PUNK BLOCK PARTY: JULY 12

A massive block party featuring live music, DJs, and DIY fashion, food, and craft vendors. Featured musicians include John Forte, Joya Bravo, Shinobi Ninja, and more.



Attica, courtesy of Photofest

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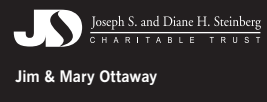


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